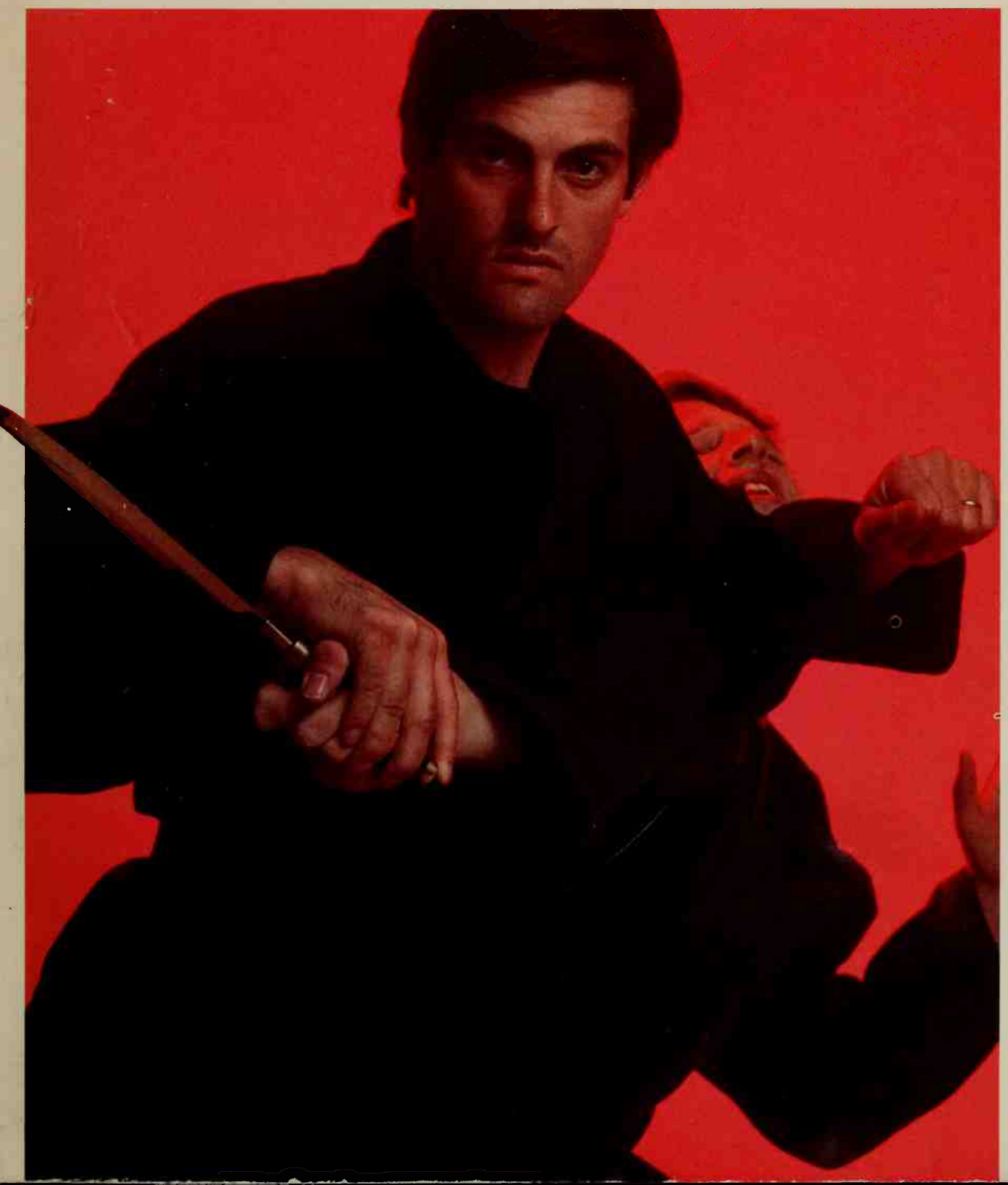
TANTOJUTSU

A NINJA DEFENSE TECHNIQUE

JACK HOBAN

FOREWORD BY STEPHEN K. HAYES



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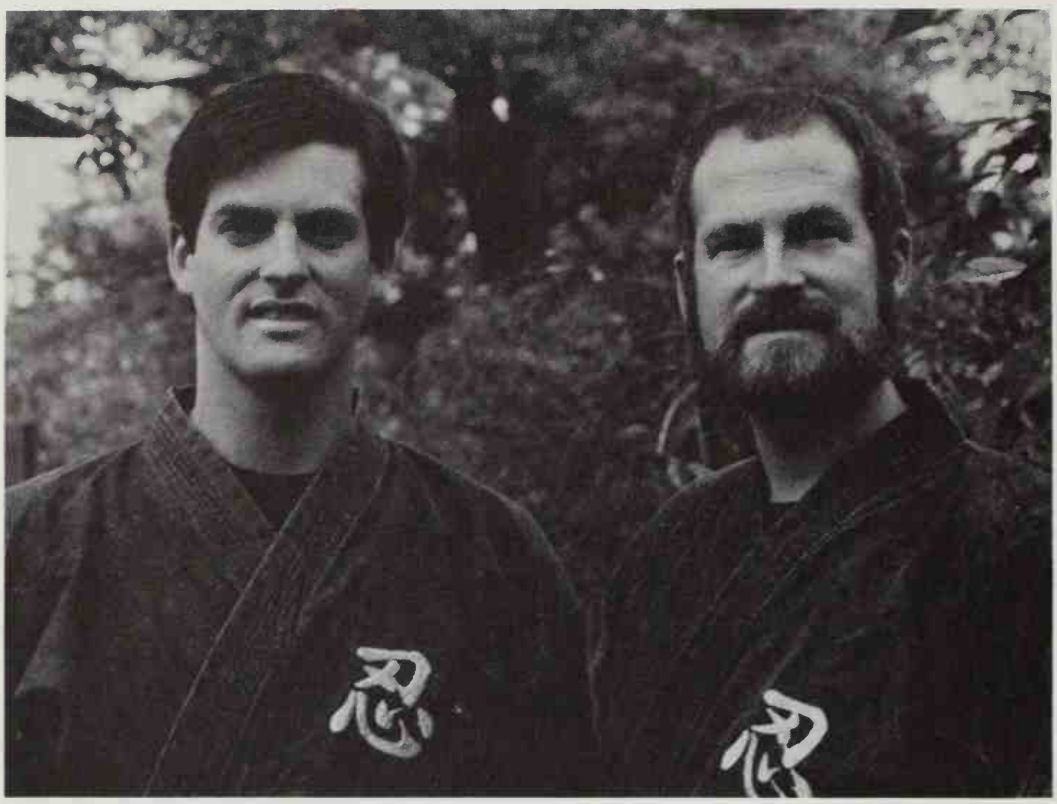
I am grateful to my friend and teacher, Stephen K. Hayes, who inspired me to write this book.

Of course, a special tribute must to to Dr. Masaaki Hatsumi, 34th Grandmaster of Togakure-ryu ninpo.

Foreword

This volume, which upon first glance appears to be a well-written, realistic handbook on surviving fights involving the use of knives, actually goes way beyond the mere mechanics of avoiding blades that would kill or maim. When viewed comprehensively, Jack Hoban's book is, in reality, a formula for training oneself to come out successfully in the face of any adversity, whether the attack materializes physically, intellectually, or even philosophically.

By working through the physical exercises in this book, the reader has the opportunity to experience and learn natural body movement. How interesting is the irony that so many individuals must concentrate on *regaining* the ability to move with natural grace in place of all the tense and angular actions that have been picked up along the way. Years of living and moving unconsciously can subtly lead us away from the naturalness and ease of movement that are characteristic of a healthy body and mind working in harmony. Regaining those skills of natural movement is the first required step toward approaching that all-impor-



tant goal of attaining a true integration of mind, body, and spirit.

The tone of this book is very physical and down-to-earth. In his discussions of regaining a sensitivity for natural physical movement and recognizing those emotional directors that dictate the dynamics of the body's movement, Jack cuts through all the formality, theory, and stylized mechanics that unfortunately are far too common in so many martial arts training halls today. Also avoided are all the tiresome self-help assertiveness mind-programming techniques, which, unfortunately, have no chance of producing results because they are not reinforced with actual physical lessons in their accomplishment.

The author looks honestly at realistic, "worst-case scenarios," and then leaves it to the reader to discover in a personal way the *principles* that bring home the value of this training as it applies to more routine examples of conflict and confrontation in everyday life. Through the use of these *taijutsu* unarmed combat examples, the author establishes the point that those universal principles

work in confrontive encounters of any sort, be they physical or otherwise.

Jack Hoban's personal background in the warrior tradition is also important for the reader to know. In my years of sharing the ninja arts that were transmitted to me during my apprenticeship in Japan, my travels and the demands of my personal training have made it extremely inconvenient for most people to study the art with me. Jack Hoban is one of those few all-too-rare individuals who did stick with the study of the Art no matter what the obstacles that time and distance placed in his way. Jack earned his expertise in the ninja combat arts through commitment and persistence, and did whatever it took to be where I was teaching, whether it was California, Ohio, or Japan. This, too, is one more subtle example of the ninja's lifeway as the art of accomplishment.

Stephen K. Hayes
October 1985

Introduction: Taijutsu and the Ninja Combat Perspective

Much has been written about ninjutsu of late, some of it helpful to the sincere enthusiast, but much of it not. For those of you interested in Togakure-ryu ninjutsu and the history of the different ninja families, I recommend the Contemporary Books ninja series by Stephen K. Hayes, particularly *Mystic Arts of the Ninja.* My purpose in writing this book is not to duplicate what has already been written, but to give modern perspective to a very old art and to illustrate some potentially lifesaving techniques.

Ninjutsu, first and foremost, is a method of personal enlightenment and personal and community-oriented self-defense. It was not created as an espionage or assassination system (although during relatively short but highly publicized periods of Japanese history the art might have manifested itself along those lines). In fact, it was never really "created" at all but had been developing as a way of life in a certain geographical area in Japan for several generations before it ever got its name.

Japan has a long history of feudalism and elitism that is

best characterized by the samurai-dominated society that many people outside of Japan are now getting a feel for. Citizens of that time who were not of the privileged class could expect usury (or worse) from their "divinely" appointed rulers. A group of mountain-dwelling people who did not happen to fit into the fabric of the established society established a counterculture as a means of continuing their quiet lives, lived in their own way. This counterculture was not a revolt, as such, but an expediency born of necessity. The government and religious establishments did not represent these people or their views, and they were born ineligible for any form of privilege. One interpretation of the word *ninjutsu* is the "art of stealth." It is easy to see that resistance to the oppression of the samurai ruling class would have been foolish if overt. These ninja families were not Bushi, and they lived in the rough and inaccessible areas of south central Japan. As a result, they were forced to develop their own philosophies and methods of community defense. In that way, ninjutsu was and is really an art of personal responsibility. During the course of history, there may again develop certain social, economic, or political conditions that demand that a people quietly assume responsibility for their own physical or philosophical defense. The principles on which ninjutsu are based may become a viable alternative for them.

Most people who are interested in ninjutsu in modern times are attracted to the ninja's method of fighting, which is called *taijutsu.* As the reader may be aware, the Japanese word *tai* means "body." *Jutsu* means "art." All body dynamics of the ninja combat system are based on the principles of taijutsu. The techniques in this book are taken from those that have evolved from taijutsu fundamentals, based on responses to common knife attacks that you may encounter today. This form of combat/self-defense is also called *tantojutsu,* "tanto" meaning "knife."

The knife, as it was 500 years ago, may still be the most intimidating weapon that one person can use against another. It is silent, easily obtainable, and easily concealed, and it is a maiming as well as killing device. The knife is an emotional weapon. It evokes fear and horror and has been

used effectively to convey a certain brand of terror in countless films, from *Psycho* to *Eye of the Needle*. Unlike the shooting of firearms, and even more traditional forms of combat such as archery, boxing, wrestling, and fencing, the knife has no similar sport application. Knives are always available; there are probably 10 in every household. They are an uncontrolled item; a person does not need a permit to own or buy one. In short, knives are everywhere, a potential weapon against you or a potential tool for your self-defense.

Learning the ninja combat system of tantojutsu is basically a two-level process. Level one is the technical level. Level two is the emotional level. Notice that I said two-*level* and not two-*step*. These two levels must be approached simultaneously in order for the training to be adequate preparation for a life-threatening situation.

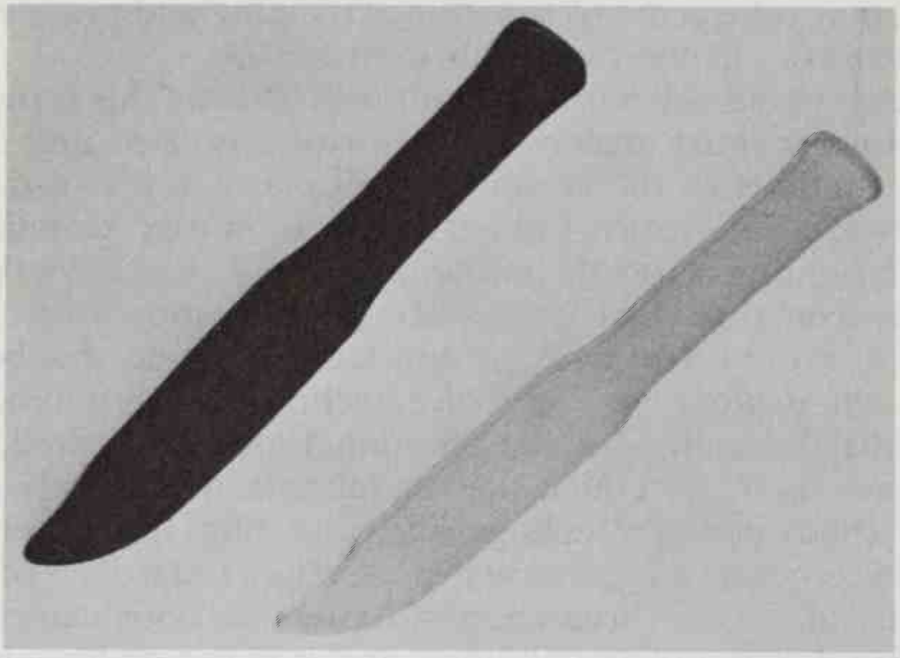
In level one, there are fundamentals of body dynamics, angling, distancing, and technique that the student must work through in order to be mechanically prepared for an attack of any type from any direction. And, though this

part may take years of repetitious training and practice, it is the easier of the two levels to master.

Level two is the more difficult part. During this training, the fighter must explore his own raw emotions and tune his reactions to the emotional trauma of a life-or-death confrontation. Knife fight training is mostly technique; knife fighting is mostly emotion. Many of the books that I have seen that deal with knife fighting show how that author would deal with certain techniques. In this book, we will explore not only the techniques of defending against the knife, but the emotional aspects as well. My purpose is to introduce the reader to a whole-body attitude (body posture, feelings, and breathing) that automatically serves as adequate self-protection, regardless of the nature of the life-threatening situation. No book can cover the total realm of possibilities, and it is the philosophical attitude of the ninja's taijutsu system that is most important in the following pages. That is my real message.

Some of the techniques in this book are rather advanced; most of the exercises are rather basic. Solid basics will take care of almost any situation. After that, even the more "exotic" techniques will seem easy to you, as long as you practice them. They will also work for you in combat if, while you train, you keep constantly in mind the "feel" of each technique and work to develop that whole-body attitude. That whole-body attitude is really just a way of knowing yourself better, and *that* is one of the secrets of the ninja combat system. The techniques should flow from the emotional suggestions at the beginning of the technique sections (Chapters 2–5). When you practice, try to act out those suggestions with each technique and get a feel for this attitude. I firmly believe that, when you are finally able to function with a well-defined attitude (whatever it happens to be at the time), your powers of personal intention will be enhanced to an extent that will make you invulnerable to those that would harm you.

For now, of course, there is the training. When training with a partner, use a hard, flat piece of wood or plastic, perhaps wrapped in rubber. Round pieces of wood that do not teach you to know where the edge is and how to use it



are not as good. The knives used in the training sequences of this book are made of acrylic and Lexan and are manufactured by Scorpion Enterprises Ltd. of Tucker, Georgia. They are excellent training tools, cost only a few dollars, and are virtually indestructible.

When you begin working out with a partner, start slowly, but *never make it an empty exercise.* Act out the full range of emotional possibilities while concentrating on that technique. Do not trade 100 percent attention to what you are doing for rote repetition. Mechanical moves, devoid of emotional awareness, could be worse than no training at all. We have all heard the story of the martial arts master who gets killed by some mugger on the streets. How could this happen? If his training had taught him only to deal with techniques, it is easy to see how a tidal wave of violent, killing emotion could short-circuit his ability to execute those normally perfect and calm responses. The person who relies on physical technique to defend himself against an attack that is most dangerous from its emotional standpoint may suffer the same fate as our hypothetical martial arts "master."

In some ways, this book is a collection of techniques that

I have seen or devised during my military, martial arts, and ninjutsu training. They are simple and practical, and they work. From a different perspective, however, this book is about basic strategy and the ninja combat system for defeating an opponent through the use of the power of your own intentions and the development of whole-body attitudes. Though we will deal specifically only with knife fight defenses in this book, I believe (and not incidentally) that working through an appropriate emotional response to learn an appropriate physical response (and vice versa) is a general principle that works in encounters of any kind.

1
FUNDAMENTALS

Before moving on to specific defenses and attitudes, let's examine some of the realities of a knife attack. First of all, a sane person's first instinct should be to avoid a knife-wielding attacker completely. Ordinarily, this would be taken for granted. Yet it is my impression that too many people go through their days in a haze of unawareness. The only way to develop streetwise savvy is to pay attention. Do not let yourself get into a position where you are vulnerable to some kind of attack. Don't walk down dark alleys. Know where your keys are so that you don't have to fumble for them in a deserted parking lot. Lock your doors and windows at night. There is safety in numbers and light. Unfortunately, most people's first desire for some kind of training is motivated by an intimidating or a violent confrontation that could have been avoided through common sense. Now their "awareness" takes a form closer to paranoia, and it is very difficult for them to gain the confidence and relaxed body movement necessary in a life-or-death situation.

If your awareness has failed you or you are drawn into

a knife fight in order to help someone else, you have to be realistic. The knife fighter has a distinct advantage: a knife! He is also probably capable of using it and willing to do so. The chances of your being cut, at least superficially, are great, no matter how experienced you are. Accept that and realize that you *have* to win anyway. A superficial cut, no matter how frightening, will probably not incapacitate you immediately. Another important realization that may help you is the fact that you are in the right. You have the right to defend yourself and to do *anything* necessary to ensure that you go home unharmed. Your opponent does not have that sanction.

If you get involved in a confrontation with a knife-wielding opponent, use anything that will afford you an opportunity to even out the odds. Throw keys, coins, or pens at the person's eyes, wrap a coat around your arm, put your shoes over your exposed hand. Remember, you have the sanction to win at any cost. Don't be afraid to fight dirty.

The ninja combat system and taijutsu have at their base some other fundamentals that are vital to remember as you move into the fight. These principles are the foundation of the physical training.

1. *Relaxed, springy footwork.* Balance is the key here. Loss of balance or mobility in a knife fight could be fatal.
2. *Breathing.* Do not hold your breath. Do not exaggerate your breathing. Try to find a natural rhythm developing between your breath and your moves. Work with this concept until the technique, and ultimately the fight itself, has breath of its own.
3. *Fight with your whole body.* Rely on superior distancing, angling, and body position to win. Do not rely on hand or foot speed. When you strike, strike with your entire body, not just with a limb.
4. *Fight the whole person.* Don't fixate on the knife hand. Observe the other person's whole body and look for a target that is easily accessible. Attack targets that are close to you.
5. *Be there 100 percent.* Be aware and keep observing your assailant, even if you are extremely frightened. When

training, train only as long as you can keep up the total awareness of your training. It is better to practice a technique once with full intention than a hundred times as an empty gesture.

When training with a training partner, you must be relaxed, alert, and careful. Do not rush at first; your goal is to build up speed gradually until you can perform the defense and/or counterattack as your partner attacks at full speed, acting out a true killing intent. Remember, however, that even with training knives there is a real element of danger in this kind of training. There is no room for egotism, so I suggest that you train with a friend that you trust and that you both communicate constantly, continuously, and verbally. Both partners must be ready for any elevation of training intensity. *I do not recommend training with a partner using a real knife,* particularly for beginners or people who have not worked together many times before.

Lastly, make a point of recalling the emotional suggestions that are provided as exercises at the start of each chapter *before* you begin physical training. Try to maintain that certain feeling that you invoke as you practice the techniques. The bad news is that the techniques will not work if you are not in a particular frame of mind. They are just plain inappropriate. For example, if you try a standing-firm type of technique when your brain is telling you to bail out, the technique will not feel or work right. You will feel that you should have taken a more defensive approach, and you will be right. The good news is that, if you practice techniques that are emotionally appropriate, you only have to let yourself feel in order to come up with the technique and strategy that will work best for you in a confrontation.

One last suggestion: If you happen to be the "attacker" in one of the training exercises, be sure to make your attack as real as possible. Even if you are working at slow speeds, act out the scenario as if you were really trying to harm the "defender." Remember, if your partner is practicing against unrealistic attacks, he probably is not learning anything that will help him in the real fight.

2

STANDING FIRM

When is the last time that you felt really confident? Maybe you are the world's leading nuclear physicist, and everyone in your profession looks up to you and respects you. Maybe you are a military unit leader, and you have no doubt that when you bark the word "atten-hut!," 40 people will lock their bodies at attention. Maybe you are an expert snow skier, and the 60-degree slope that petrifies everyone around you is a snap. I'm sure that everyone has felt that surge of confidence and ability at some point, at least to a minor degree. In a situation that involves a physical confrontation, techniques that flow naturally from this kind of confidence can be a viable choice. Perhaps the assailant is obviously inept or partially incapacitated. Maybe you are so highly skilled that the outcome is moot and needs only to be played out. The most likely situation is the case in which the assailant is frightened and uncommitted. In any of these circum-

stances, a properly trained individual may be able to stand firm and deal decisively with the situation.

See if you can get that feeling of decisiveness and confidence right now.

EXERCISE

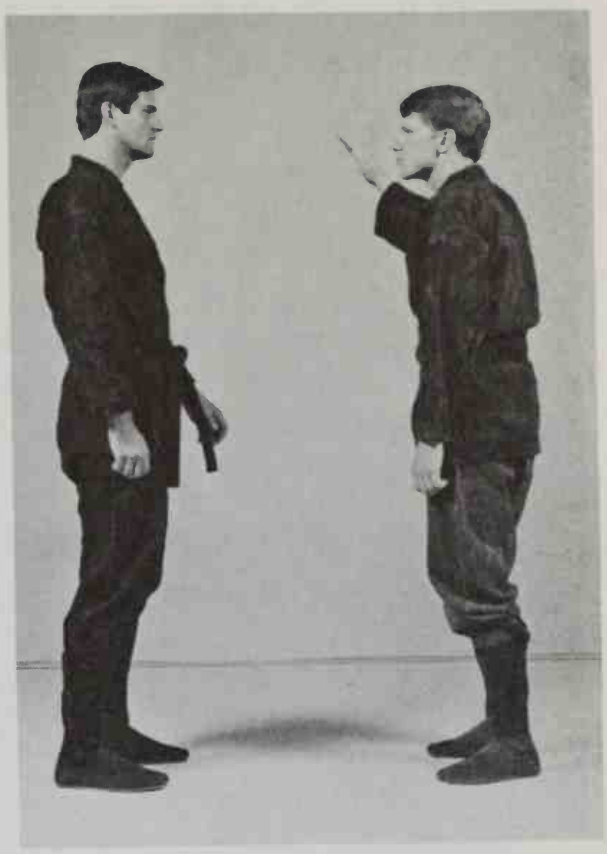
Stand solidly with your feet shoulder width apart. Relax your body, feeling the tension flow out. Start at your head and work down. Close your eyes. Feel the tension in your scalp and forehead and breathe it away. Look for tension in your face, neck, and shoulders and let it go. Relax your arms, hands, chest, and back and see if you can attain a naturally (rather than forced or arched) straight standing position. Relax your knees and feel close to the earth. Stand as if your feet are the roots of a tree and you are a mighty oak. Start to feel a heaviness in the buttocks. This becomes your center of gravity. You can even breathe as if you are breathing from this area. Take nine long breaths. Once you feel solid, reach back in your memory for a time when you felt most confident, capable, and in charge. Begin to associate that feeling with your body position and breathing pattern. Make the emotions, the breathing, and the body all part of the same feeling, indistinguishable from each other. Take your time. (If you sway a little at first, don't be alarmed; even great oaks swayed when they were young saplings!)

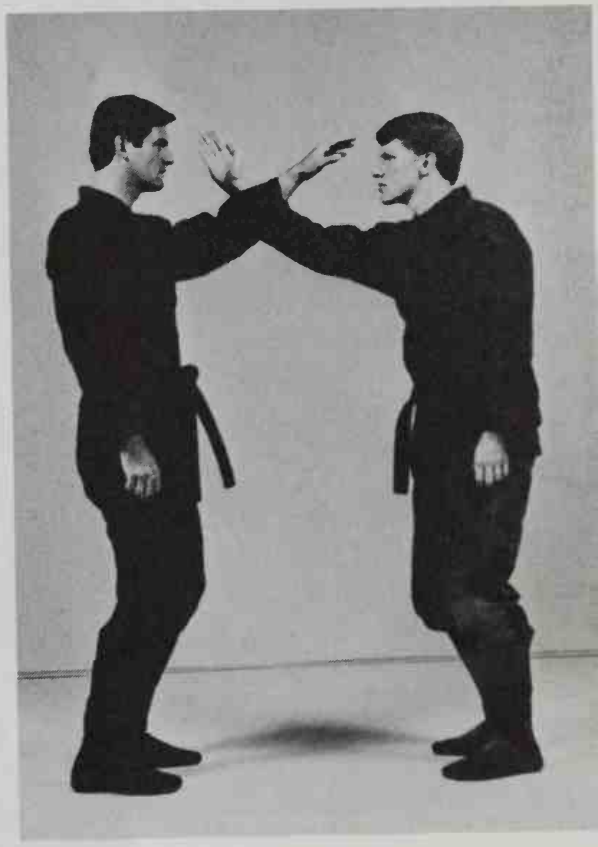
This feeling is what we will refer to as *standing firm.* If you have given this exercise a good try, you may realize that it is more than a physical posture. It is a total-body feeling that includes emotional attitudes, breathing, natural posture, and maybe even the recollection of a similar feeling from your past. For the techniques that follow, be sure to maintain this feeling. Also, remember that this exercise and the ones in the other chapters are just that: exercises. Treat them as a new, if not fun, learning experience and don't take them too seriously. If you can't maintain the feeling as you train, stop. Your training must be two-leveled to be totally useful. Don't practice empty exercises.

EXERCISE

Assume your standing-firm attitude. (From now on, when I refer to *attitude* I mean the emotional as well as the physical attitude, accompanied by the appropriate breathing pattern.) Take a few moments for preparation. Have your training partner step up to you and walk through a simulated slap or strike to the side of your head. *Start out in exaggerated slow motion!* Place your hand slowly out in a relaxed "stop" gesture to block the blow. As you feel your partner's arm hit yours, do not tense, but rather relax the arm and try to stop the blow as if you could do it from your hips and buttocks. Relax your knees and breathe out. You may have a tendency to tense your arms and back. Don't. Try to maintain that good standing-firm position and "hold" from the hips. Look your partner in the eye with a steely gaze and act out your confident feeling. If you can't do it, ask your partner to slow down. Take a long time to work up to full speed. You may not be able to do it in the first session. That is perfectly all right. There is no hurry. Eventually, your partner can get into the act by acting out his own aggressive attack, making believe he really wants to harm you and, perhaps, making an intimidating noise or facial gesture as he swings at you. After a while, you can switch over and let your partner try.

Now let's look at a common knife attack. Remember to keep that standing-firm attitude. Both you and your partner should act it out as you go, starting slowly and working up to a realistic speed.





STANDING-FIRM TECHNIQUE 1: UNARMED DEFENSE AGAINST A STAB TO THE STOMACH

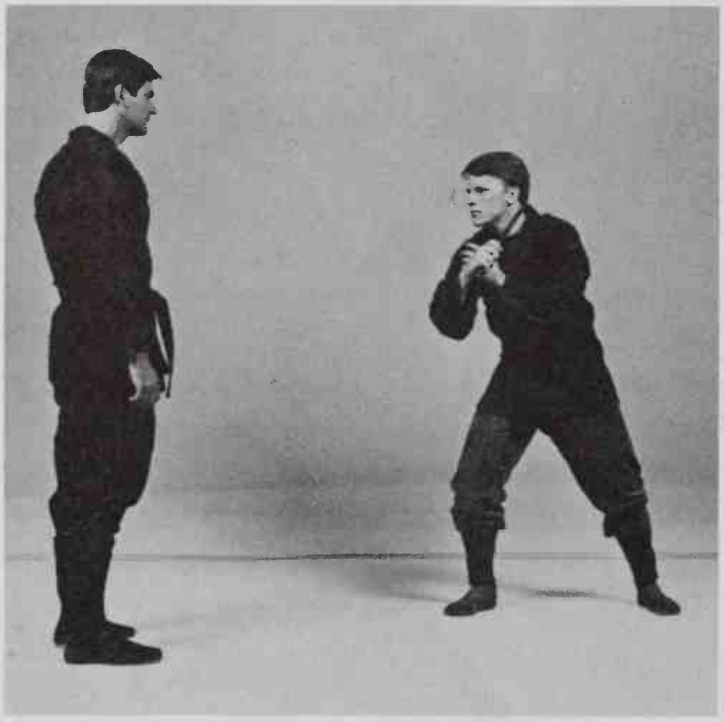
The attacker steps in with a lead-hand stab to the stomach, and the defender lowers his hips as he straightens out his left arm to strike the inside of the attacker's arm, deflecting the blow. The defender then moves in slightly as he simultaneously traps the attacking arm and clubs the side of the attacker's head. The defender then executes a wrist twist to disarm the attacker.

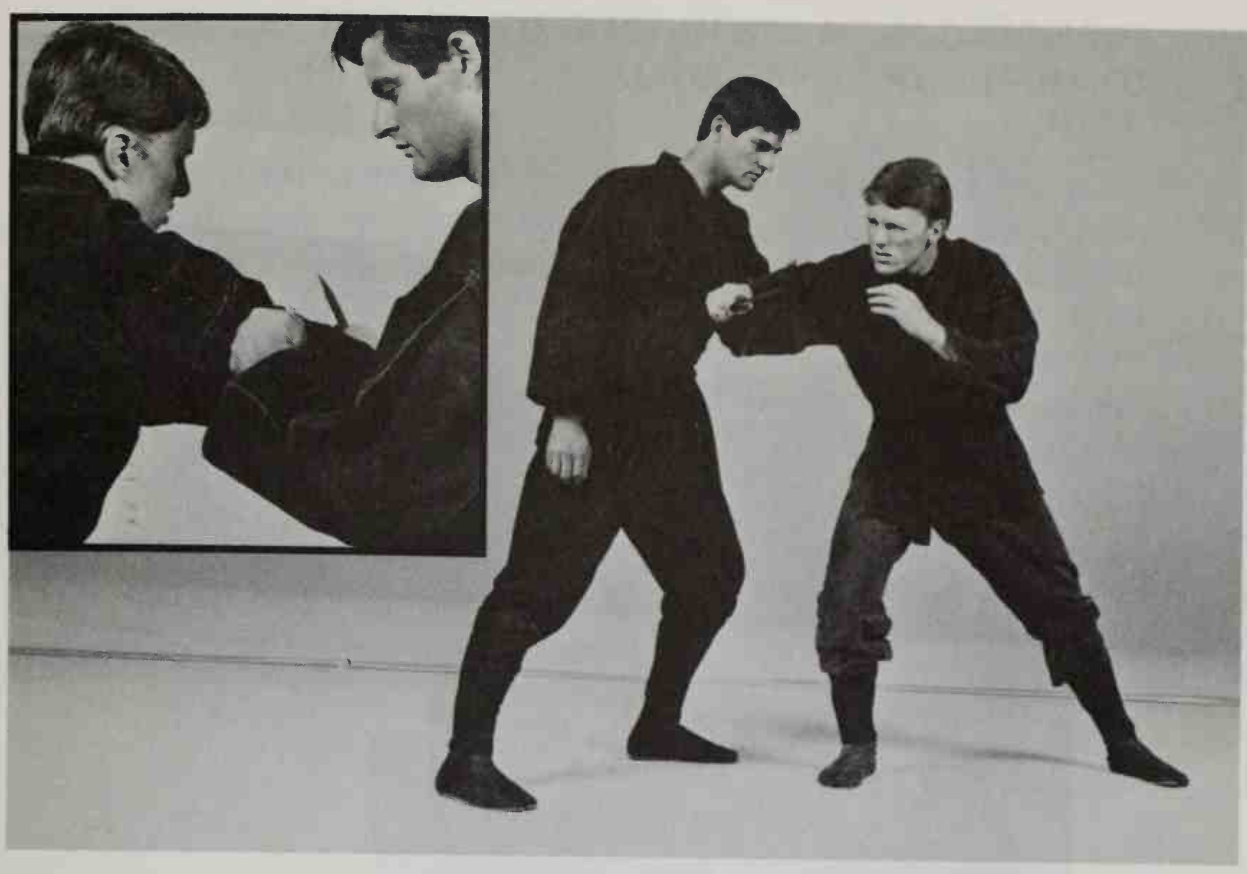
STANDING-FIRM TECHNIQUE 2: UNARMED DEFENSE AGAINST A FOREHAND SLASH TO THE STOMACH

The attacker employs a cross-slash to the stomach. The defender drops his left arm as before, then bends his left arm as he grabs the attacking wrist with the right hand The defender secures the attacker's arm by grabbing near the elbow as he shears the wrist in a clockwise direction for the disarm. The defender's right knee ends the fight.

STANDING-FIRM TECHNIQUE 3: UNARMED DEFENSE AGAINST A BACKHAND SLASH TO THE STOMACH

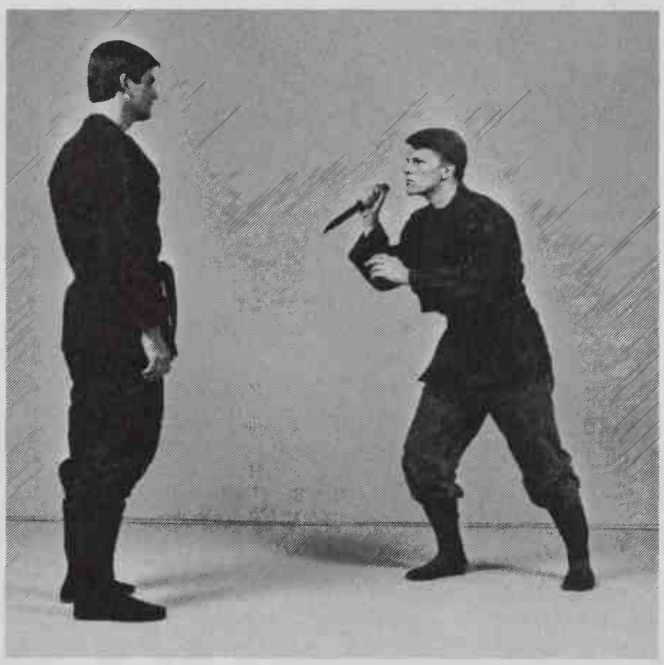
As the attacker slashes across, the defender moves in and simultaneously slams a left fist into the back of the attacker's arm. He then grabs the right wrist and steps into the attacker's elbow to disarm.

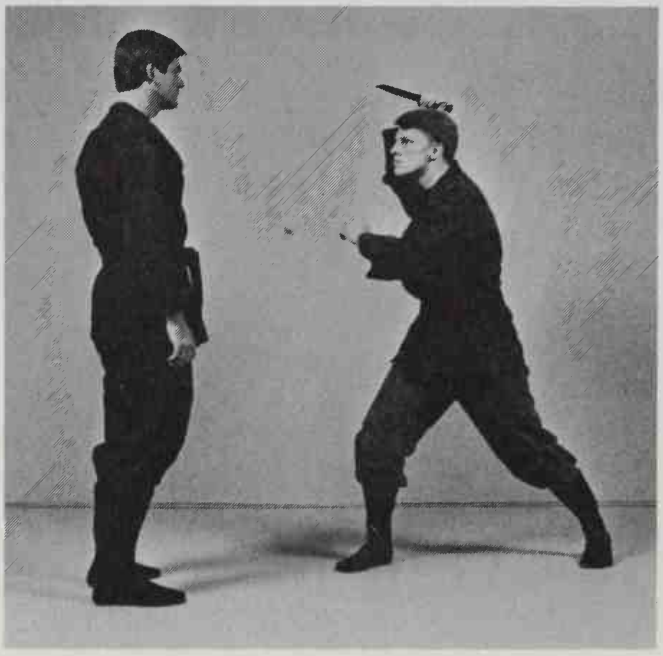


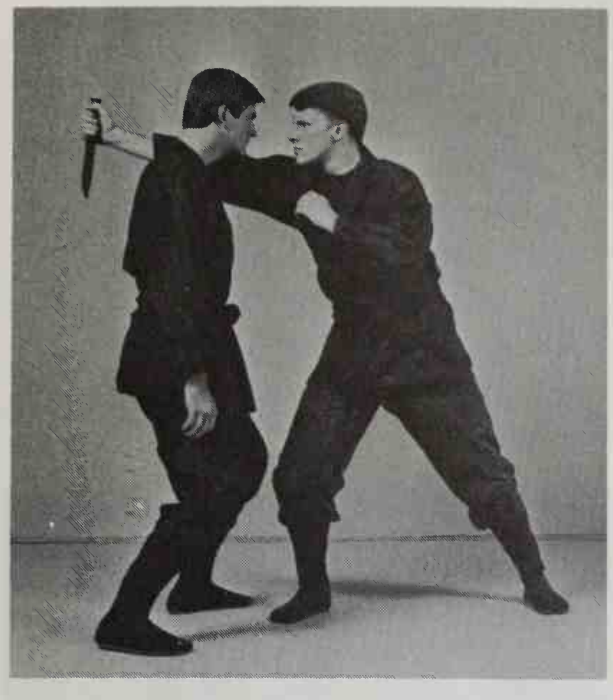


STANDING-FIRM TECHNIQUE 4: UNARMED DEFENSE AGAINST AN OVERHEAD STAB

The attacker lunges in with an overhand stab to the face or neck area. The defender subtly lowers his body, causing the knife to miss and the attacker's elbow to hit the defender's shoulder. The defender then locks the arm with the side of his head, steps forward with the left foot, and applies an arm bar with the left arm to take the attacker to the ground, where he can be disarmed.

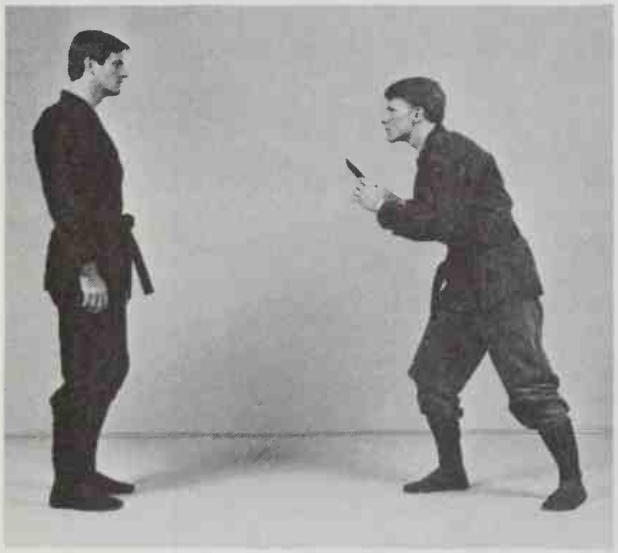


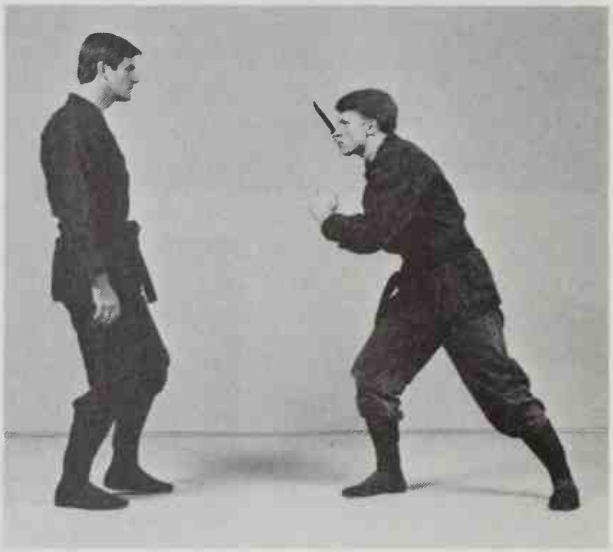


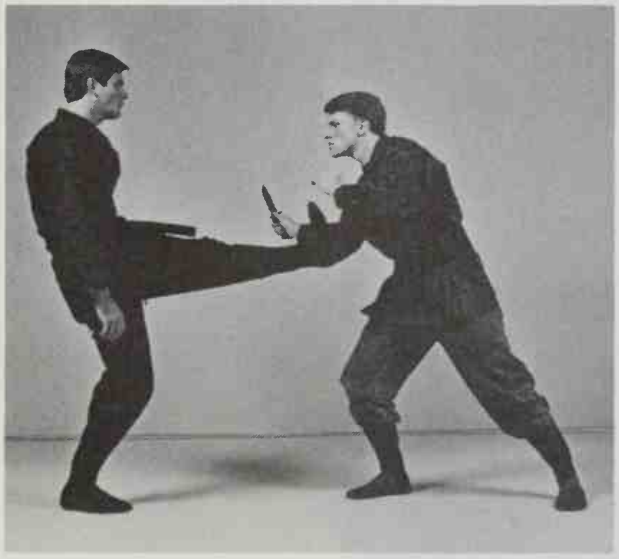


STANDING-FIRM TECHNIQUE 5: DEFENSE AGAINST A SLASH TO THE FACE

As the attacker slashes to the face, the defender stomps into the incoming forearm. As the attacker attempts to recover, the defender steps in and locks the attacking arm to his body and slams into the attacker's chin with his right hand. The defender then uses his fingers to push the attacker to the ground, braces the attacker's arm against his leg, and disarms him.







These techniques are designed to work if you have a standing-firm attitude. If your resolve crumbles; your body is unfamiliar with a properly balanced, solid position; or your breathing is improper, *the techniques probably will not work.* Therefore, the real purpose of these exercises is to help you learn to be more in touch with an appropriate body/mind/breathing attitude. This self-knowledge will help you in any kind of confrontational situation, not just a knife fight. A confident and aware person can use these techniques to disarm a less able assailant easily.

In the likely circumstance that you feel totally *un*confident when faced by a knife-wielding attacker, you may feel yourself wanting to retreat rather than stand there and confront the person. This defensive feeling is the subject of the next chapter.

3

DEFENSE TECHNIQUES

There you are, sitting in a classroom somewhere in your past. You are minding your own business when, suddenly, you hear the loudspeaker crackle: "Johnnie Jones, report to the principal's office—*immediately!*" Your name is Johnnie Jones. The feeling of dread comes quickly and completely. "What did I do?" you may ask yourself. Whether you did anything or not, your pulse quickens, your ears turn red, and you feel the beginning of a gnawing feeling in the pit of your stomach. You may even get the urge to run and hide. You'd like to be anywhere but expected in the principal's office. You haven't even heard the allegations against you, but you are already uneasy. If you could think logically, you might even realize that there is at least a 50-50 chance that the principal wants to commend you for something rather than reproach you, but the thought never enters your mind. Let's face it: you are on the defensive.

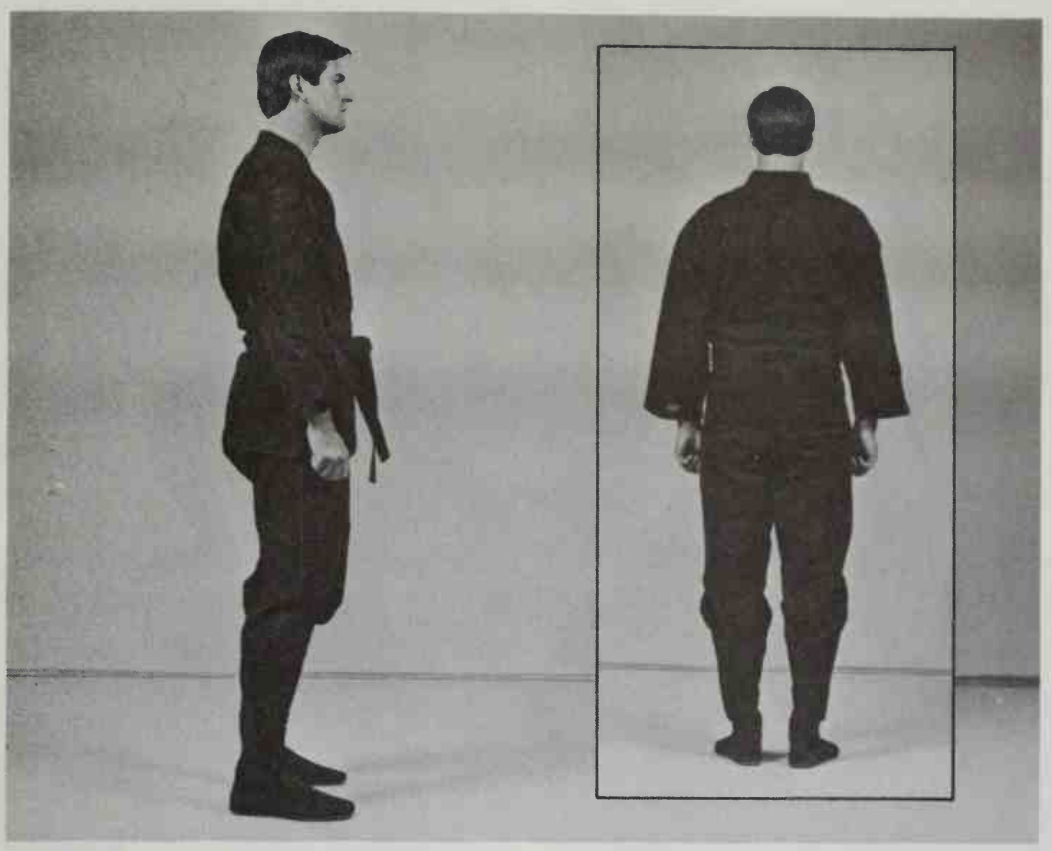
In a situation in which you are face to face with a knife-wielding assailant, a defensive attitude would be understandably appropriate. Since it *is* a natural and appropri-

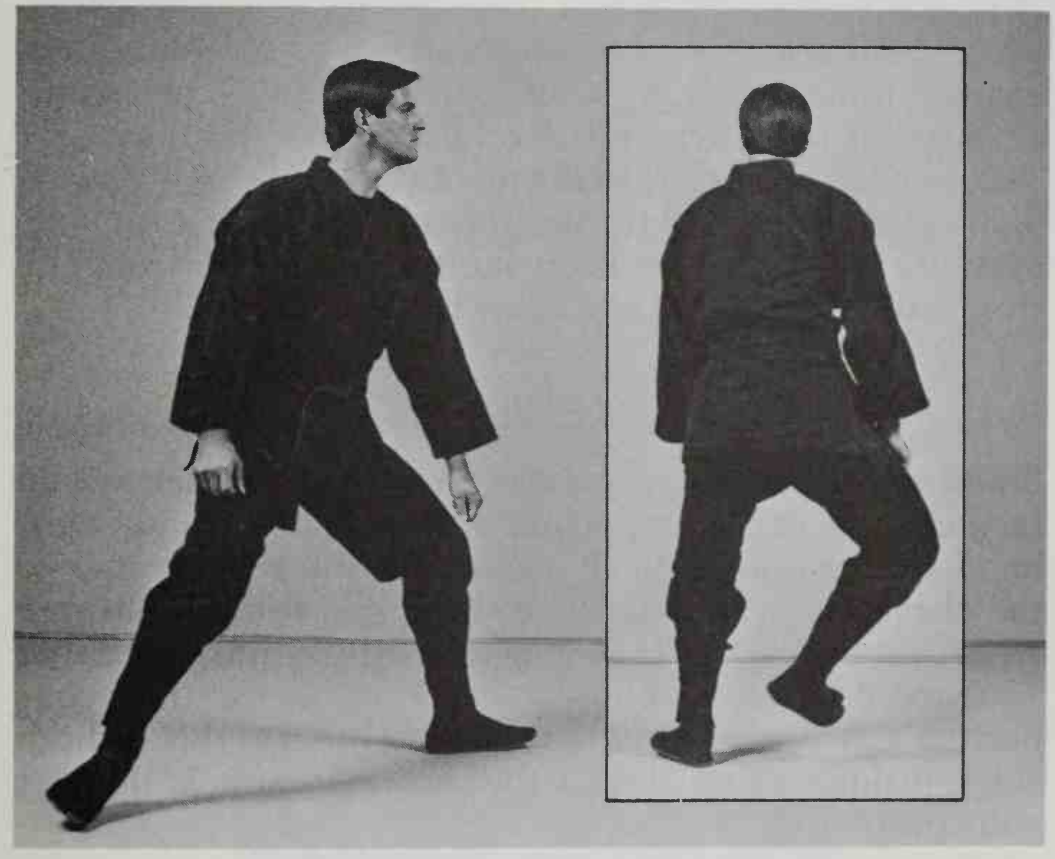
ate feeling, chances are that a workable knowledge of how this attitude manifests itself in our bodies can be the clue to how to turn this feeling into a tool for our self-protection.

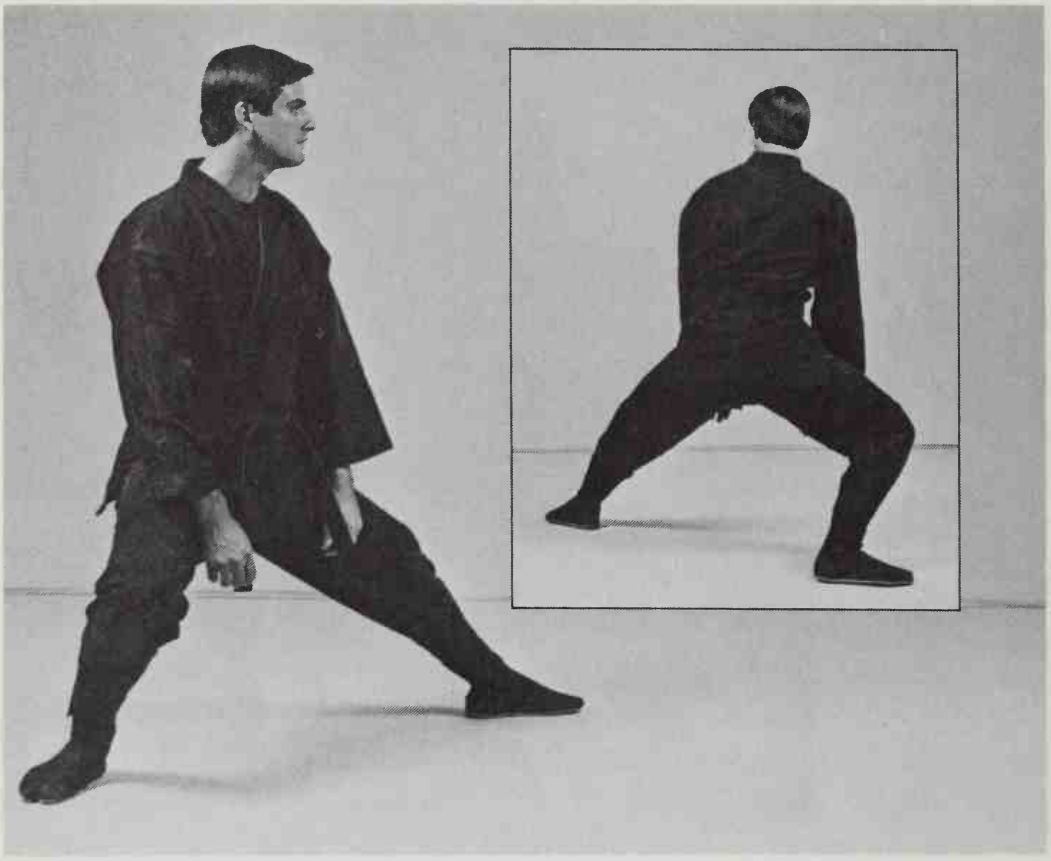
EXERCISE

Stand relaxed with your feet shoulder width apart. Close your eyes and remember that time in your life when you felt most defensive. See if you can re-create that sick feeling in the pit of your stomach. Once you have located the exact spot, let your breathing come from there. Become familiar with both the location and the feeling and cement the association in your mind. Take your time. You are going to make a defensive move as soon as you are ready. Consider that the body has its own intrinsic understanding of itself that you want to tap into. Since the body creates that queasy feeling in your stomach, perhaps that area should lead a defensive or protective movement. Move, now, back to the right at a 45-degree angle as shown. Lead with your stomach and let the rest of the body follow the lead in a relaxed manner. You should feel as if you want to set your right buttock down on the edge of a chair that was suddenly not there. To compensate, pull your right foot back under your buttock to keep yourself from falling all the way to the floor. Try it to the other side. Remember to keep the rest of your body relaxed, breathe out as you go, and lead with the stomach (try to avoid a tendency to step back—lead with the foot—rather than fall back). Go for smoothness of movement rather than speed. Keep your back naturally erect rather than bent at the waist.

The position you find yourself in as you drop to your backpedaled 45-degree stance is a very valuable one in a self-protection situation for several reasons. It is safe. You are, temporarily at least, out of the reach of an attacker. It is stable. You are not twisted, turned awkwardly, or dancing on the tips of your toes. It is a setup for a counterattack. The 45-degree angle removes you from the path of an assailant yet provides you with the proper angle from



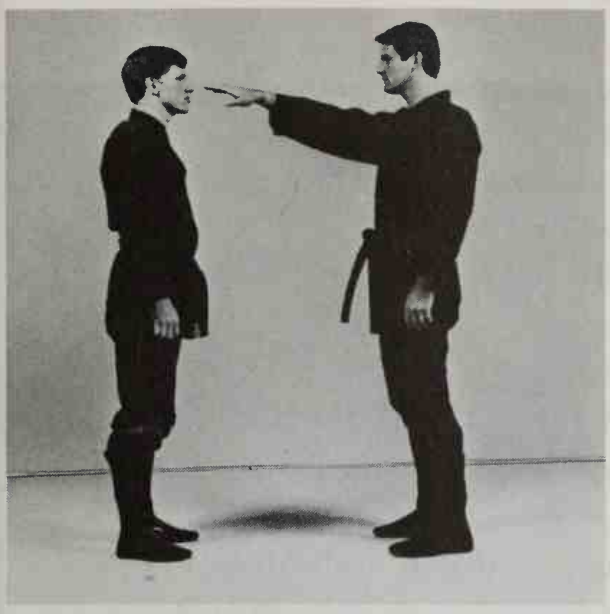


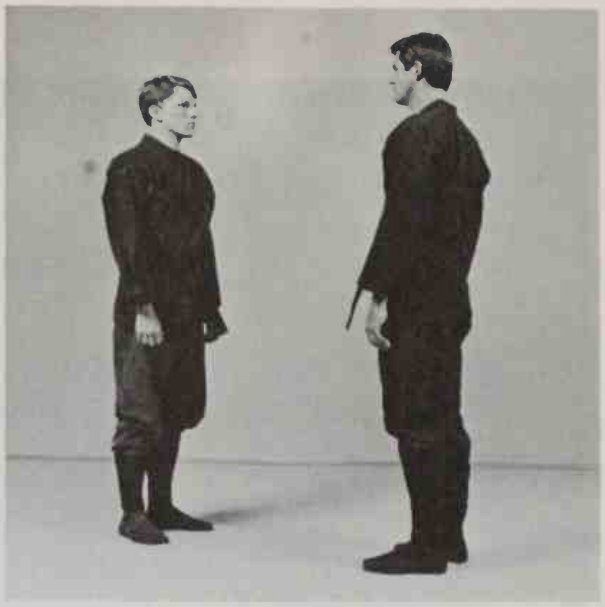


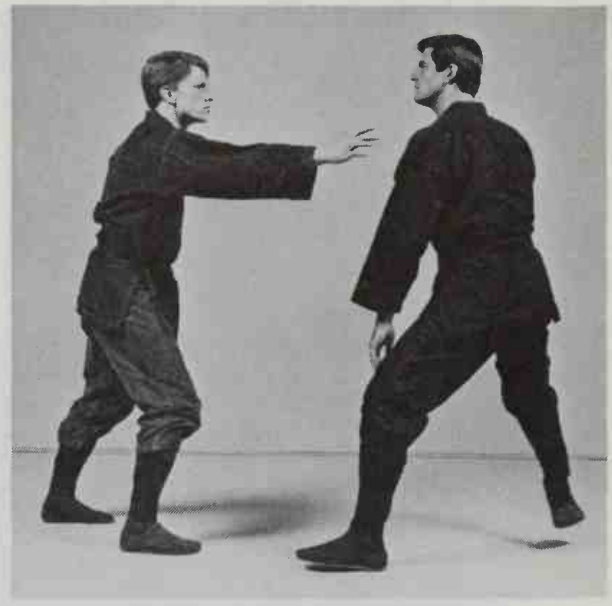
which to deliver a strong counterattack, as will be demonstrated in the technique section that follows. It is natural. It was your body, after all, that needed to retreat and sent you that queasy feeling in the pit of the stomach as a signal on how to move. Now try the defensive attitude with your partner. Remember to keep the feeling, move from the stomach, breathe, and start slowly.

EXERCISE

Stand one arm's distance away from your partner as you face each other. Your partner reaches out with his right hand as if he is going to shove or grab you in the center of the chest. As you see him move, fall back at a 45-degree angle, out of reach. Check your distance to make sure that you are completely out of the way. Notice that your partner's arm is exposed and vulnerable. Do this to both sides, inside and outside of the incoming attack, then let your partner try it.







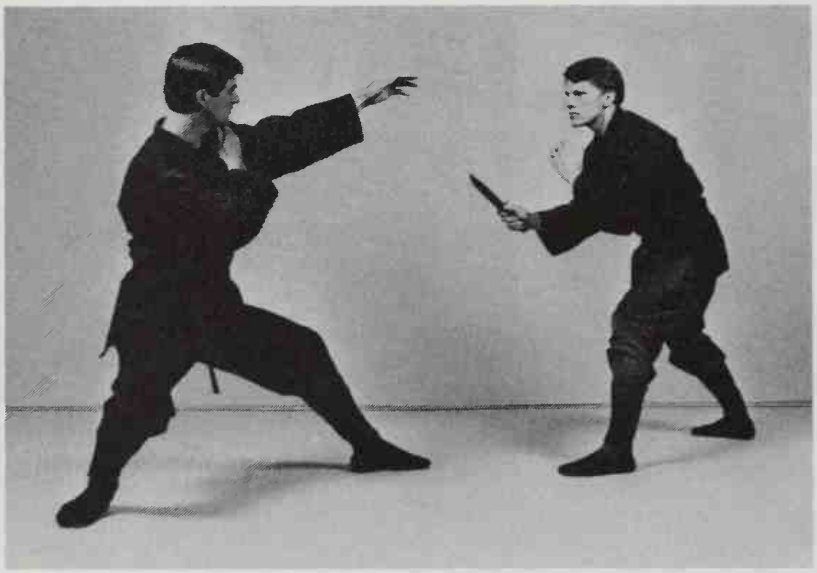
You are now ready to try some real self-protection techniques. Although you will be doing some other things with your hands and legs, try to maintain that defensive feeling as you train. If you can't keep the total attitude during the training, *stop* and go back to the exercises.

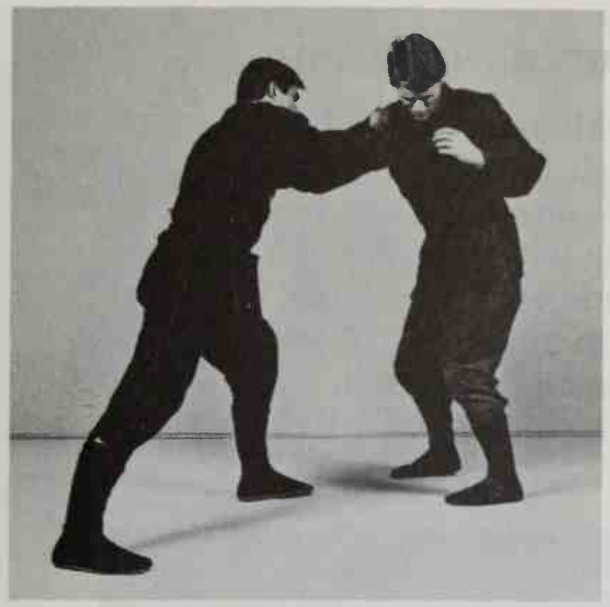
DEFENSIVE TECHNIQUE 1: DEFENSE AGAINST A STAB TO THE STOMACH

The attacker stabs in with a committed stab to the stomach, and the defender falls back to the right at a 45-degree angle as he simultaneously smashes down with his left fist. The defender then rocks back in and grabs the attacker's right wrist. The defender then rocks back to the 45-degree angle as he slams his palm into the side of the attacker's face. The defender then pulls the attacker to the ground as he applies a wrist twist and a lever to the elbow. He then secures the attacker's arm with his knee as he disarms him.

DEFENSIVE TECHNIQUE 2: DEFENSE AGAINST A SLASH TO THE STOMACH

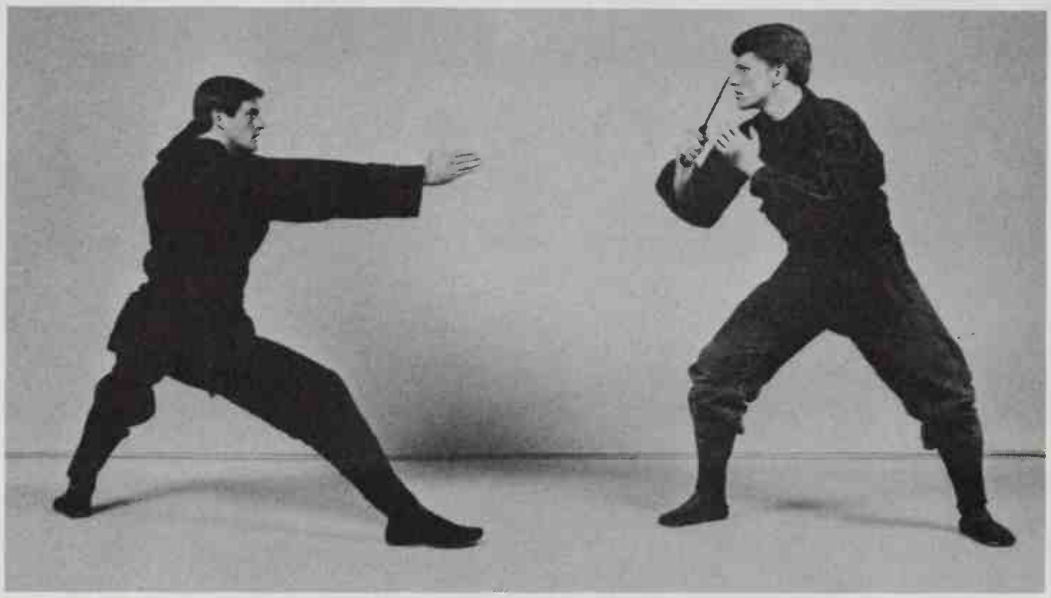
The attacker slashes as if to cut across the defender's stomach. The defender backpedals, as before, and then smashes into the wrist. As he rocks back in, he uses the continuing motion to hit the biceps with his right arm. Then, the defender grabs the injured wrist with his left hand and swing-kicks the attacker's right leg. The defender finally pushes the attacker's head to the ground with the left hand as he uses his body and right hand to disarm the attacker.

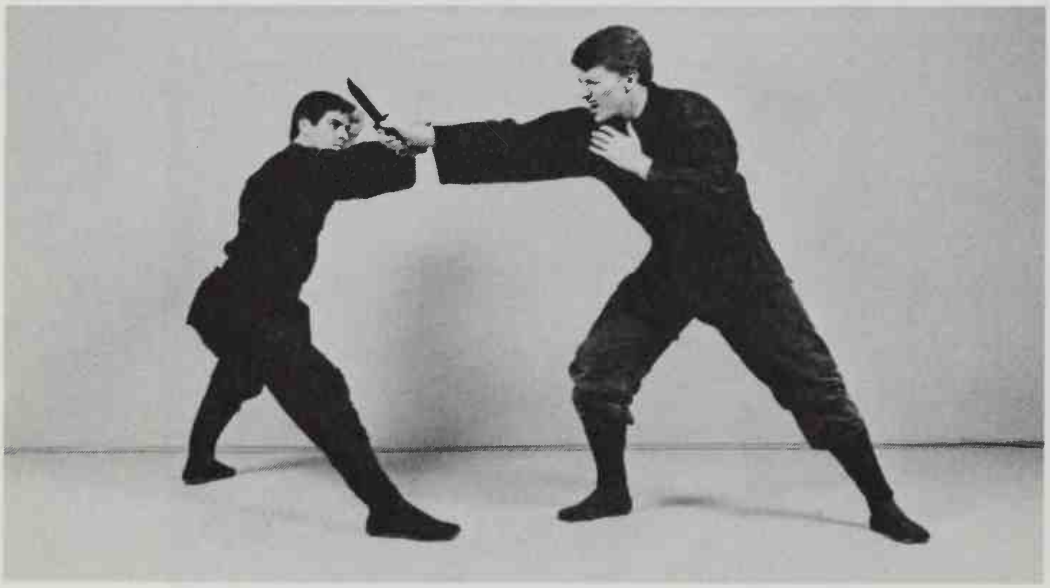




DEFENSIVE TECHNIQUE 3: DEFENSE AGAINST THE BACKHAND SLASH

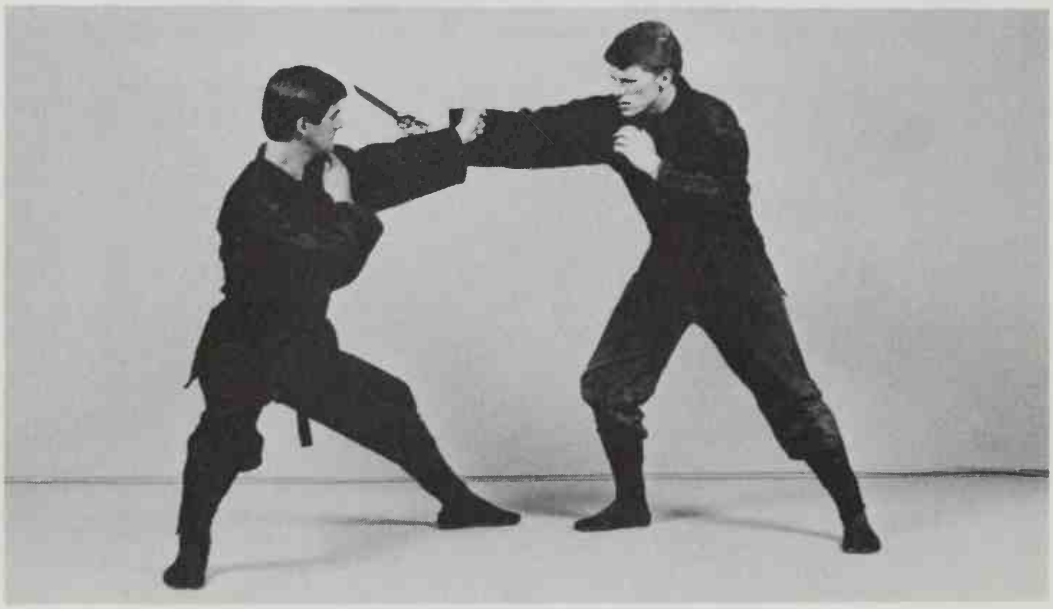
The attacker executes a backhand slash. The defender moves back at a 45-degree angle and smashes the back of the attacker's wrist. As the defender rocks in, he slides his right hand under the attacking wrist and secures it to his body. He continues the motion by stepping into and through the elbow as he strikes the side of the attacker's head. By lowering his entire body from the hips, he forces the attacker off his feet, where he can be easily disarmed.





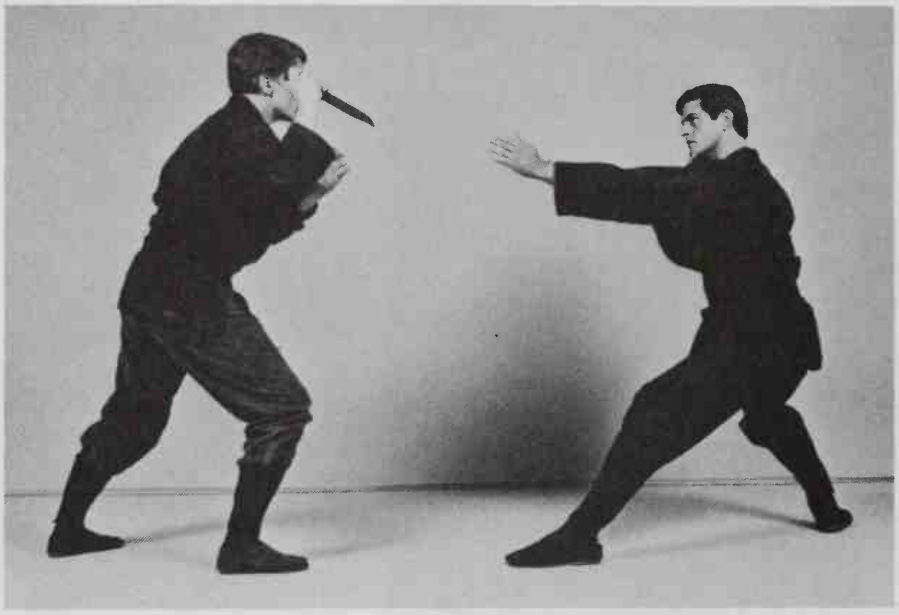
DEFENSIVE TECHNIQUE 4: DEFENSE AGAINST THE SLASH TO THE FACE

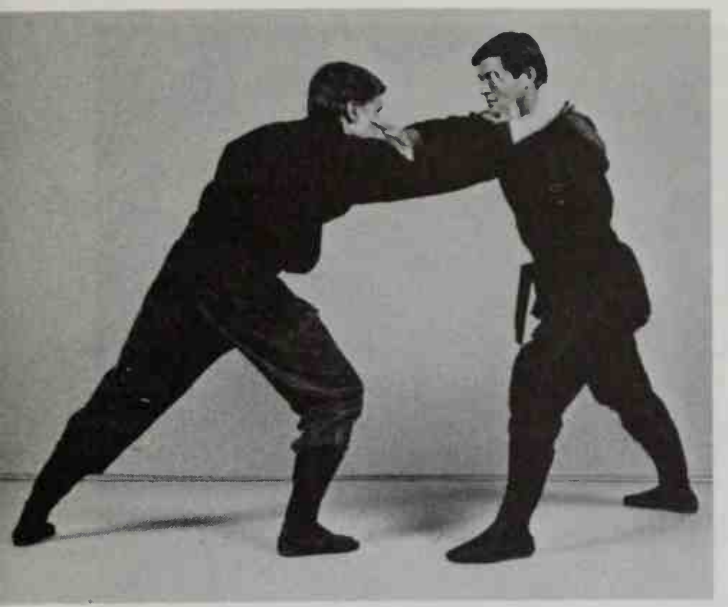
The attacker slashes to the defender's face, and the defender drops back to the 45-degree angle while snapping open his right hand to attack the attacker's wrist. He then grabs the wrist with his left hand, rocks in to attack the right bicep, then straightens out the right arm to topple the attacker. The defender then disarms the attacker by forcing the twisted wrist against the ground.



DEFENSE TECHNIQUE 5: DEFENSE AGAINST THE OVERHEAD STAB

The attacker stabs down at the chest or neck of the defender. The defender drops safely back at a 45-degree angle and punches into the exposed wrist of the attacker. As the attacker resumes the attack, the defender rocks in and executes an arm lock, which immobilizes the attacker and makes him vulnerable for a takedown and disarm.





Obviously, there are an infinite number of possibilities in this defensive attitude, just as there are an infinite number of possible attacks. This is just another reminder that it is important to appreciate the entire defensive attitude of feeling, breathing, and moving. Be sure to get yourself safely out of the way of an attack and take that split second to gain a distancing and angling advantage before you attempt the counter.

4

COMMITTED ACTION

Maybe you can recall a time in your life when you were so intent on doing something that you were seemingly oblivious to anything that might distract you. Perhaps you were coming home from boot camp on your first leave and you were trying hard to maintain that highly disciplined exterior that had served you well during the last 10 weeks. You step off the plane and toward a throng of people at the gate. The crowd seems to part, and you see your mother waiting for you. Suddenly, with tears in your eyes, you drop your bag and rush forward to embrace her. Your macho image and even the grins of onlookers become unimportant and totally forgotten.

The word *aggressiveness* connotes an improper, negative feeling when it is used to describe the committed actions of a person in a critical situation. Somehow it implies bullying and meanness. I prefer to use the more generic word *commitment* to describe this feeling. Like the young man in our example above, it implies the ability to "go for it," without fear, shame, or any reservation whatsoever. In a situation in which there is a good possibility

that you could be severely injured or killed by a knife-wielding assailant, it may be that you feel it most appropriate to just "go for *him!*" In our study of possible emotional responses to the knife threat, we have proceeded from the position that our feelings can be a clue as to how our bodies work most efficiently in that particular attitude. Let's look at the committed attitude.

EXERCISE

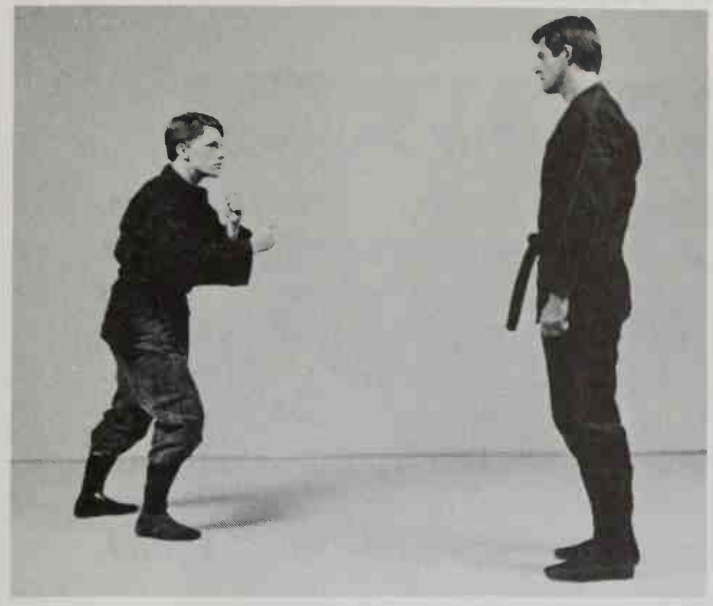
Stand relaxed with your hands at your side and think of a time when you were excited and anxious to meet someone. Maybe it was your chance to be introduced to a favorite TV personality, or perhaps you were just waiting to see your best friend, whom you hadn't seen for a long while. You start to become excited, and your feet want to shuffle in your impatience. You may feel a rush of adrenaline that seems to be concentrated in the area of your solar plexus. Breathe from there. When you are sure that you have the feeling, imagine that you see this awaited person approaching. When he is close enough, breathe out, then reach out as if to shake this person's hand. Move your right foot forward slightly to stay balanced. Relax after a second and bring your left foot up to your right. Try the "handshake" with both hands.

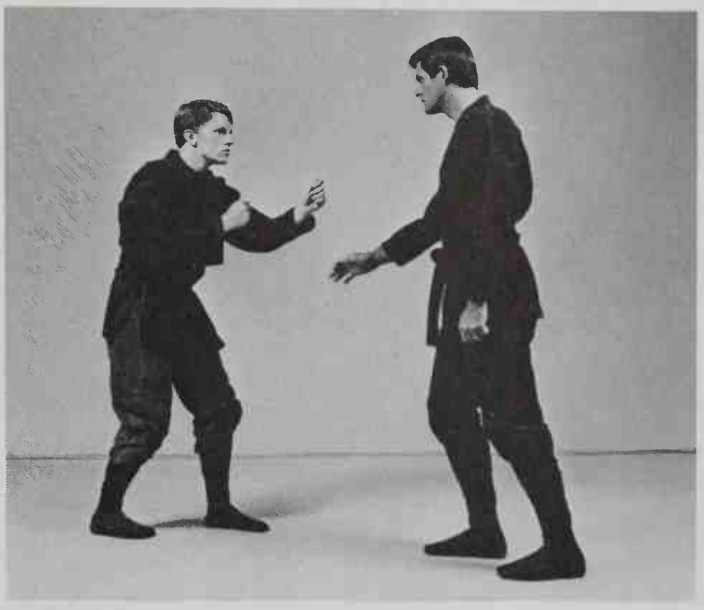
In most striking systems, from boxing to karate, a chambering or cocking action is usually employed to prepare the arm or leg for the strike. Obviously, that set-up action works. We have all seen the impressive results, from knockouts in the ring to broken bricks in the demonstration halls. In a life-or-death situation, you may or may not have time to set up a strike. Maybe you just aren't fast enough to beat your opponent "to the draw" that way. An alternative is the committed strike using the body. It utilizes the normal yet subtle (and, as you will see, the potentially powerful) body action that you use to shake hands or open a door.

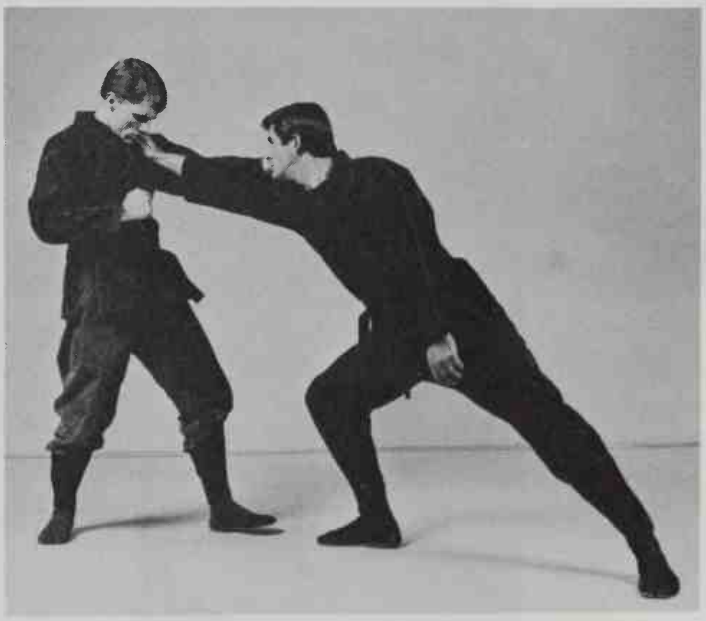
EXERCISE

You face a training partner who starts an exaggerated punch at your head. As you sense the fist moving forward, swing your left hand up with that "handshake" feeling. Continue until your palm smacks the hollow of his shoulder, thus stopping the fist from finishing its trip to your head. Your left foot, you notice, has slipped forward so that you can keep your back straight. Again, try to breathe from the solar plexus as you move. Recognize the fact that your arm has farther to go than your foot, so don't "step." Your hand moves, pulling your torso toward the target until, eventually, you feel the need to move your foot. Start slowly and speed up gradually. Now switch and let your partner try it. *Relax!*

Usually, people are mystified that an attacker could punch first yet be thwarted almost every time by this simple "handshake" move. Mechanically, the simple explanation is that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. Also, the action of body following hand supplies the inertia to stop even very powerful punches. Then there is the emotional edge. You *have* to win; you *can't* be beat; you are just more committed than your attacker. As you try the techniques that follow, make sure your breathing is explosive and comes from the solar plexus area. Use relaxation to increase your speed. Don't cock or chamber. Be intense and committed in your mind (not jerky and manic in your body). Go for it!

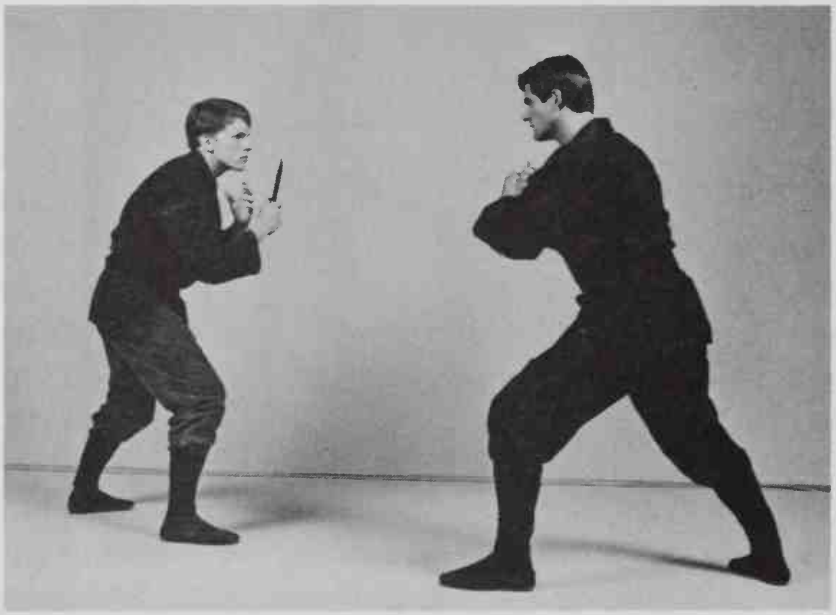


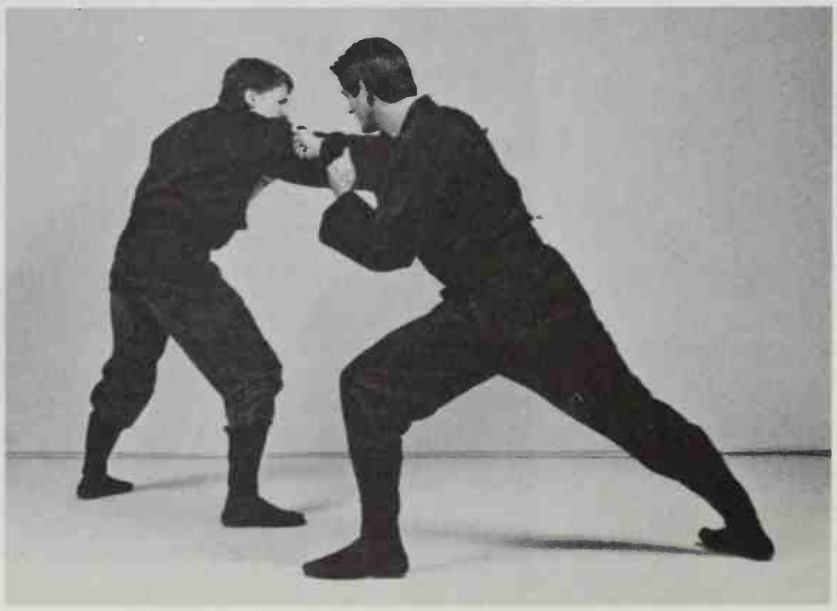


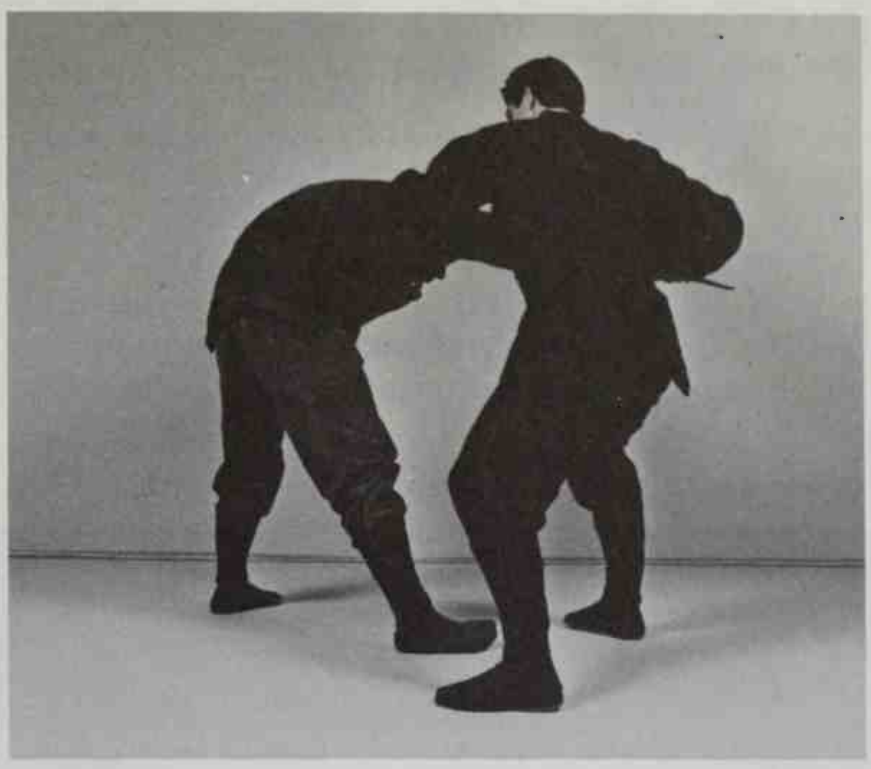


COMMITTED TECHNIQUE 1: DEFENSE AGAINST A STAB TO THE STOMACH

Your opponent starts a committed stab to your stomach, and you step forward at a 45-degree angle and attack his upper arm with a straight right hand punch (*note:* this is not a backfist). You then rock toward him from the hips and slam the attacker in the ribs with the left fist, remembering to hit with the whole body. You are simultaneously grabbing the knife-wielding arm at the wrist so that your continuing body motion allows you to slam into the attacker's extended elbow to throw him to the ground, where he can be disarmed.

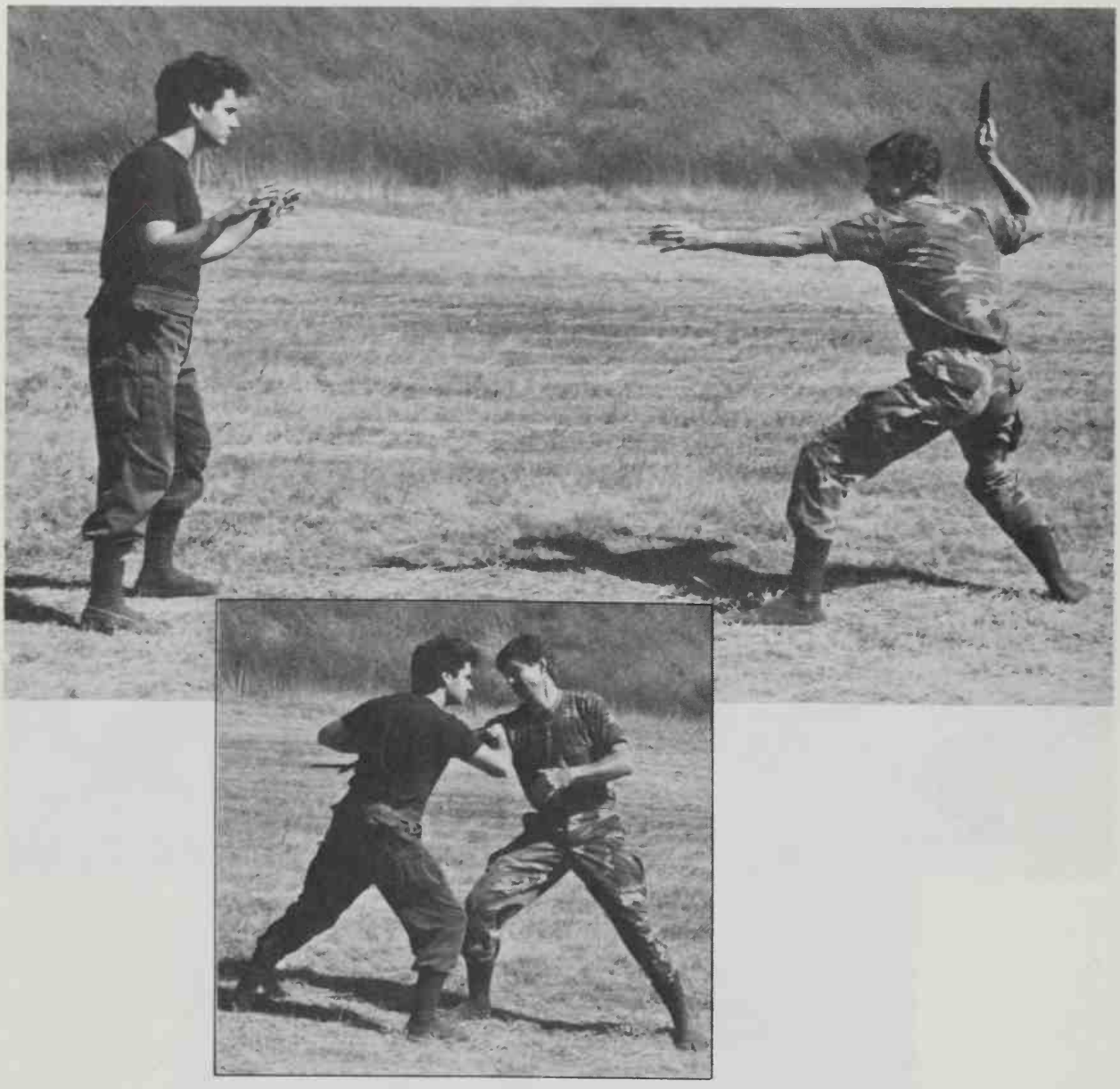






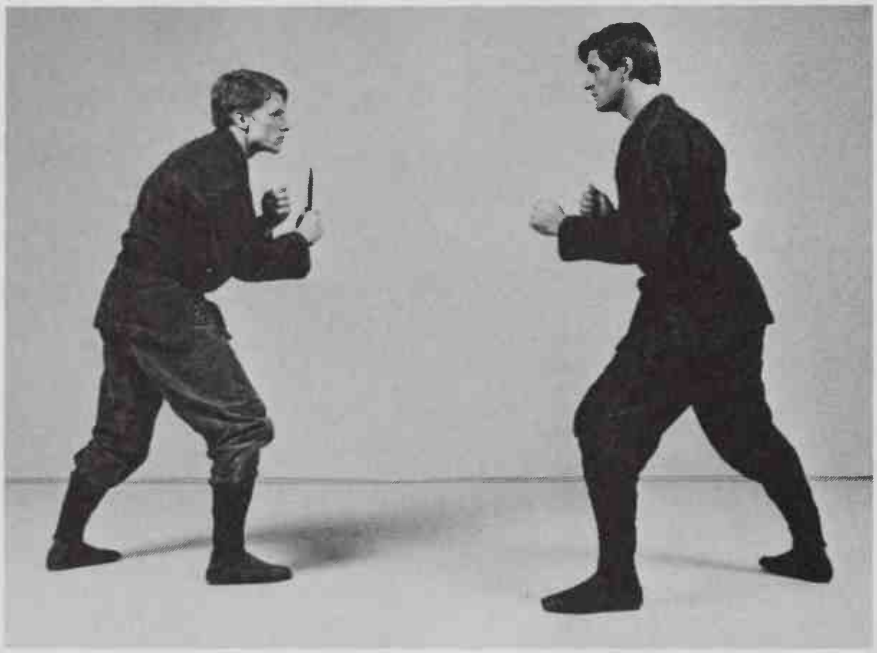
COMMITTED TECHNIQUE 2: DEFENSE AGAINST A SLASH TO THE STOMACH

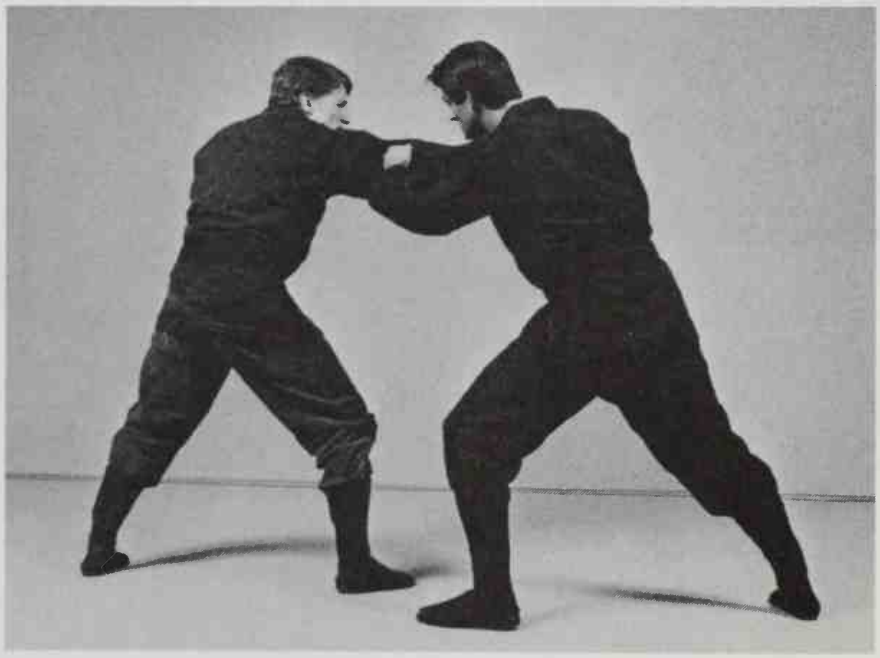
As your opponent slashes to your stomach, move inside the attack and slam into his right biceps with your right hand. Your continuing forward momentum sets you up for an elbow strike to the breastbone as you slip your left arm under his to secure it. You then straighten your right arm, forcing the attacker off balance and eventually to the ground. Step over the arm to immobilize it and effect the disarm.



COMMITTED TECHNIQUE 3: DEFENSE AGAINST A BACKHAND SLASH

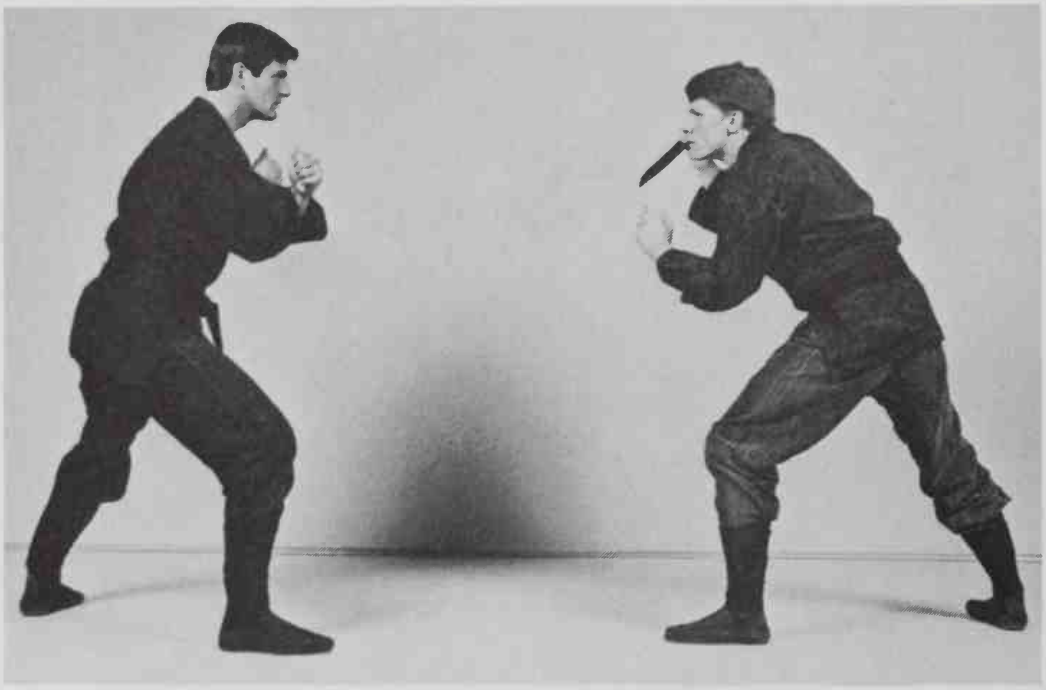
Your opponent starts a backhand slash, which you attack by moving your body inside the arc of the cut and smashing the upper arm with your left fist. You then grab and secure the knife-wielding hand and move under the arm to throw the opponent to the ground and disarm him.

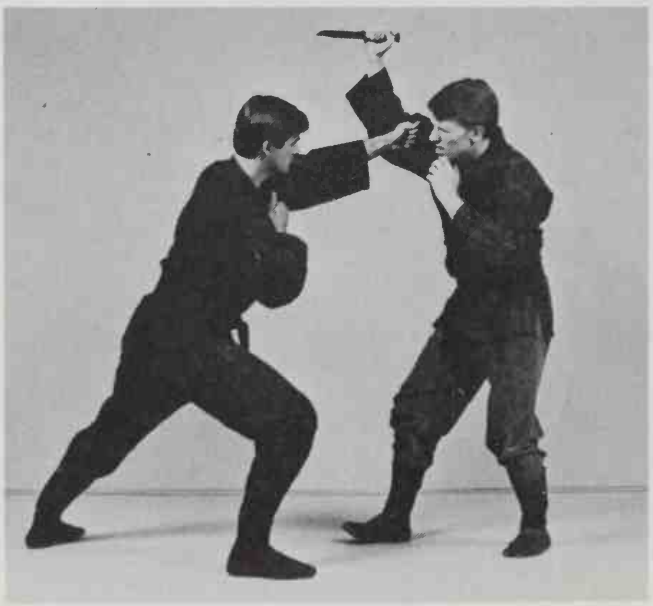




COMMITTED TECHNIQUE 4: DEFENSE AGAINST THE DOWNWARD STAB

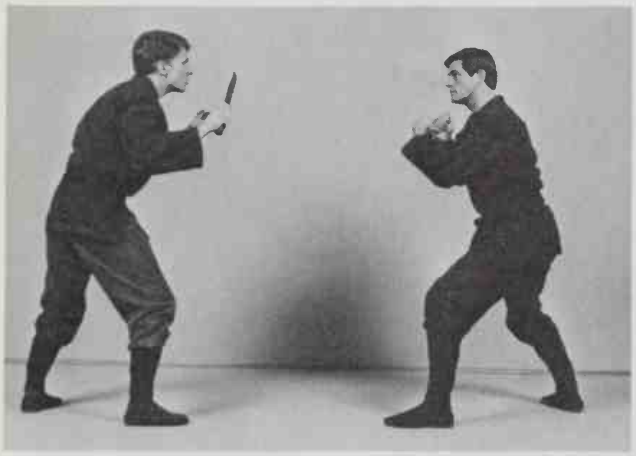
The attacker stabs down at the defender, who moves inside the attack and smashes the shoulder joint with the left hand. Continuing the forward motion, he uses his whole body to "scoop" the attacker's elbow into an elbow immobilization. He then attacks the other shoulder with his thumb or fingers in the same area as the original counterattack to force the person to the ground for the disarm.

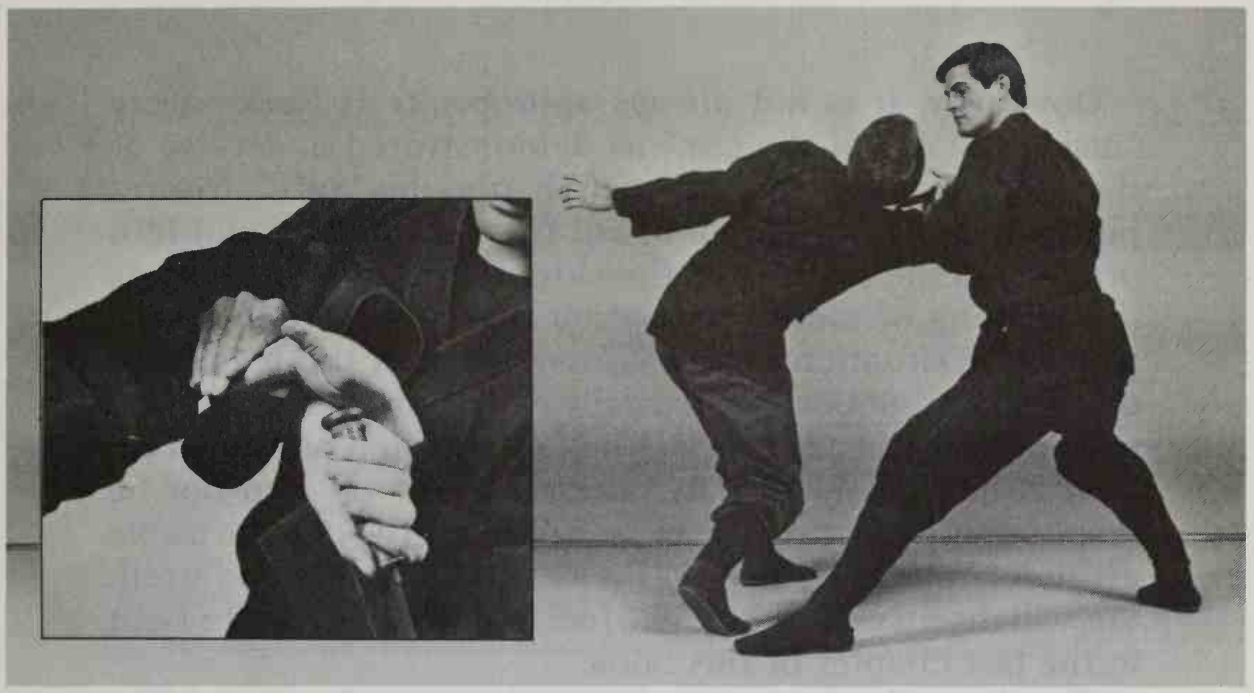




COMMITTED TECHNIQUE 5: DEFENSE AGAINST A SLASH TO THE FACE

The attacker slashes at the defender's face. The defender steps inside the arc of the cut and slams the exposed forearm with a clubbing open-handed strike (notice also that the defender's head is now lower than the trajectory of the blade and is temporarily out of danger). The defender then rocks slightly in toward the attacker's right and slams a forearm to the bottom of the attacking arm. The defender then clasps his hands to immobilize the arm and force the attacker to the ground, where he may have to stomp the attacker's face in order to make certain that the conflict is over.





Obviously, it is not always appropriate to seek safety "inside the arc of the cut," as demonstrated in several of the techniques in this chapter. It may be "safe" from a purely technical standpoint, but it is very hard to put into practice in the real world. Consider this kind of training as the refining of merely an option that you have in a self-protection situation. Discussions of whether this technique or that technique would really work on the street are useless because an attack is never the same on the street as it is in a book. You, as the defender, will also not be responding consciously in a pure, easily categorizable attitude. Your body will do the best it can to defend itself. We will discuss what it might feel like to be in a knife fight in the last chapter of this book.

That is really all we can do at this point about real life-or-death situations—discuss them. For now, your job is to try to get your emotions, breathing, and body working together in order to refine your working attitudes so that they function most naturally as options in self-defense circumstances. Since it has been my intent to talk about possible attitudes that we may adopt when confronted by a knife-wielding assailant, I have left perhaps the most easily understandable reaction to this situation for last—the desire to avoid completely the whole thing . . . but not being able to.

5

AVOIDANCE TECHNIQUES

Have you ever been involved in a seemingly meaningless hassle of some kind? There you are, belted into your airliner seat for a four-hour flight. Without warning, the buffoon next to you starts a dissertation on how grass is really purple (or some such silly argument). At first, you think you are hearing things. It's hard to believe! Everyone knows that grass is green; it's undeniable, irrefutable! Yet the man argues on and on. Against your better judgment, you try to argue back. You are just plain unwilling to permit the craziness to continue; besides, you are stuck there. You begin to feel your impatience rising. It almost seems to gurgle at the base of your throat. Your body tells you to *get out!* You listen. You take a deep breath and excuse yourself as if to go to the lavatory. You corner a flight attendant and beg for a new seat. You are lucky. There is one left, all the way at the front of the plane.

If you are able to act competently in your own self-protection, a knife attack presents a similar problem, at least philosophically. Involvement in a clash with a maniac

brandishing a switchblade is something that any sane person would avoid if he could. But what if the situation does occur? It is possible that you may actually feel disgusted and frustrated rather than angry or even frightened. In a more everyday scenario, how often do we waste our time or energy on a problem for which there is no immediate solution (or for which the solution is absolutely not our responsibility)? We have all had those experiences, and when we look back, we invariably realize that, if we had "counted to 10" or even just walked away, we could have avoided a lot of needless grief. Whatever the "matter of principle" was that forced us to embroil ourselves unnecessarily in a no-win situation, it obviously goes against our nature. Our nature tells us, "Get away!" Maybe we should listen. The bottom line in the myriad of feelings that are possible within the full range of our emotions in this situation—whether frustration, disgust, or boredom—is our body telling us to avoid the problem. Maybe we should sleep on it and start fresh in the morning, or, as in the case of a knife fight, simply avoid the knife and continue going about our business. Obviously, the man with the purple grass has a problem, not us. If we can look dispassionately enough at the situation, our knife-wielding man is just as unreasonable. Let's avoid him.

EXERCISE

Stand relaxed with your eyes closed, feet slightly farther apart than shoulder width. Imagine a time when you had a real "don't hassle me" attitude. Notice that, when you start to approach this avoidance attitude, the feeling seems to be centered at the base of your throat. Whether you are yawning from boredom or "gurgling" with impatience, the action comes from the same area. Breathe from there. Soften your knees a bit, lift your arms out until they are parallel to the ground, and slowly begin to sway from side to side. Maintain this airy, light feeling and visualize a ball of negative energy heading straight at your throat, which you easily avoid as you rock gently to the side and out of the way.

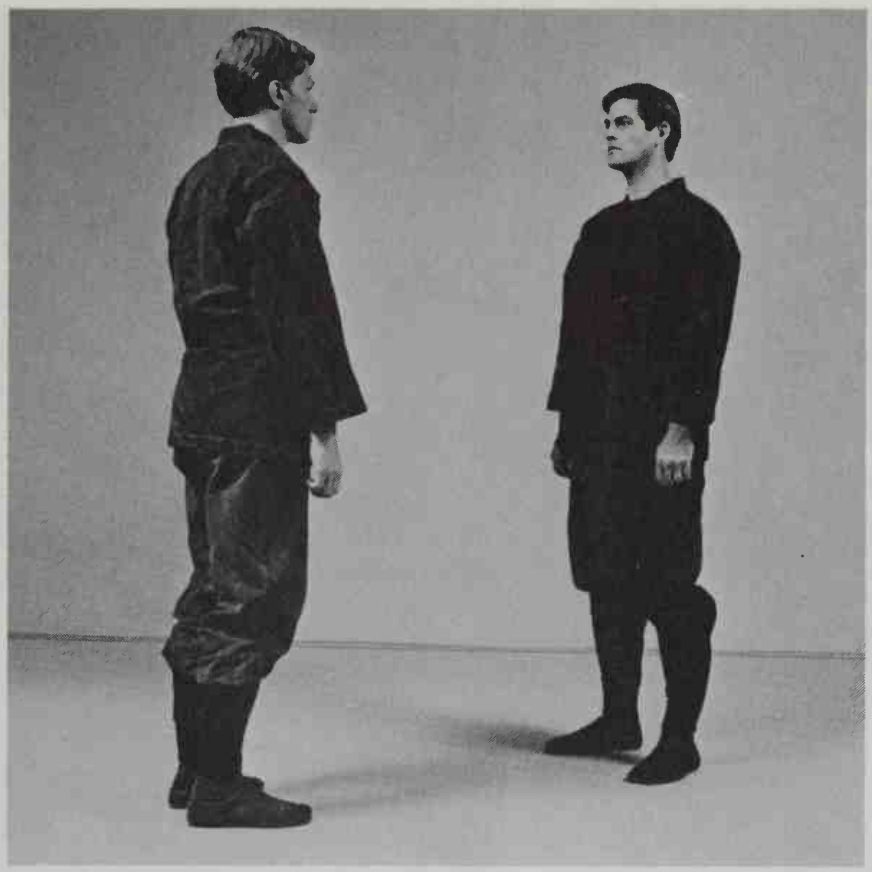
You may find that it is easy and even relieving to rock out of the way of that negative energy. If you felt the desire to bend at the waist or hurry the exercise in any way, try to avoid those tendencies. Once you feel natural and totally relaxed, try the next exercise with a friend.

EXERCISE

Warm up to your avoidance attitude by using the exercise above. Now, open your eyes and have your partner reach slowly and menacingly for your throat. Without jerking, overreacting, or twisting and/or turning your body unnaturally, rock gently to one side or the other to avoid the grab. Softness, not swiftness, is the key here (if you were sneaking out of a boring lecture, you wouldn't slam the door behind you). Your goal is to move with soft knees and with great subtlety so as to fool your partner into thinking that he was really going to be able to touch you. He is surprised when he doesn't because he didn't notice you move. Ask him about what he sees. With his input, refine your movements until you can pull off the optical illusion that I have described, then let your partner try.

I hope the lesson that you learned in this last exercise filters into your training in the other attitudes as well. Creating optical illusions through subtle and relaxed movements is a tool that is extremely useful in any self-protection circumstance, not only in an avoidance attitude.

You will use this optical illusion in the following technique section in order to subtly shift yourself out of the dangerous path of an attacker's knife. The attacker may even think that he has succeeded in cutting you or become bewildered by the fact that you seem to have "disappeared." While you have the attacker at one disadvantage or another, you can move easily to disarm or disable the attacker and thus avoid a lengthy and potentially dangerous struggle.

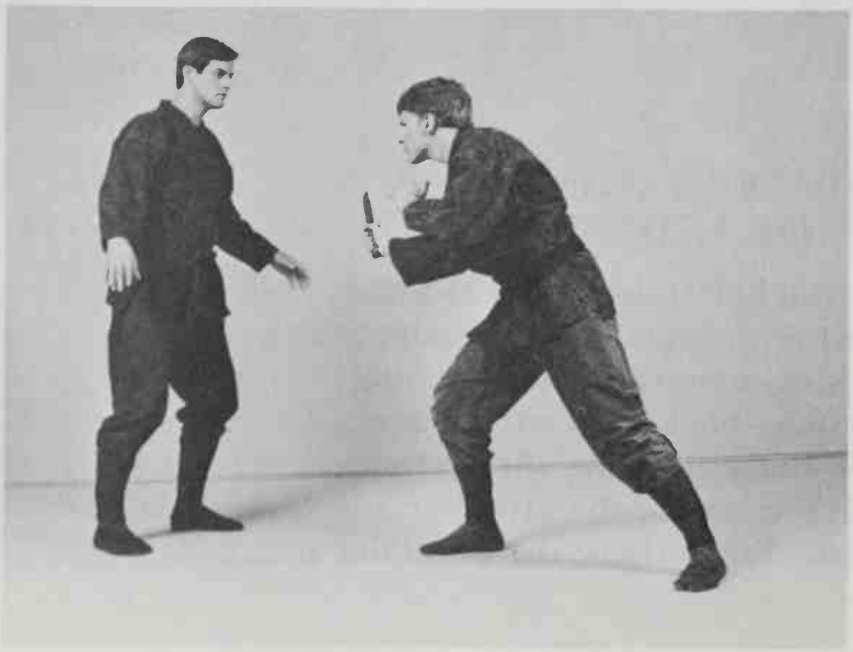


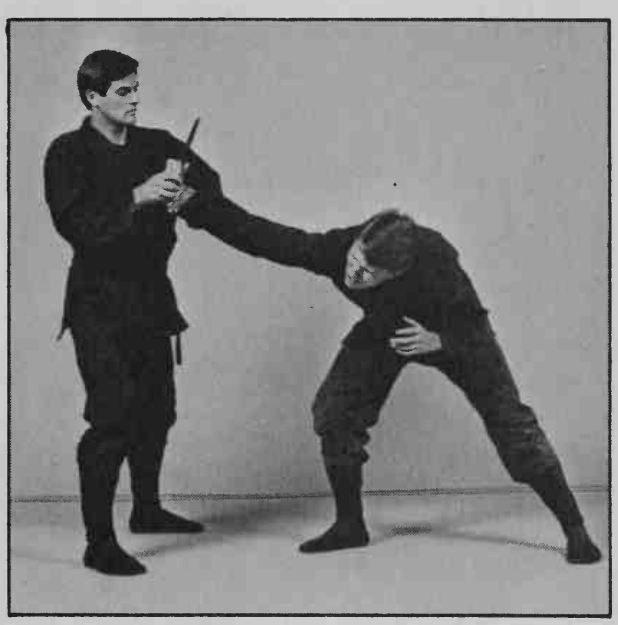
AVOIDANCE TECHNIQUE 1: DEFENSE AGAINST A STAB TO THE STOMACH

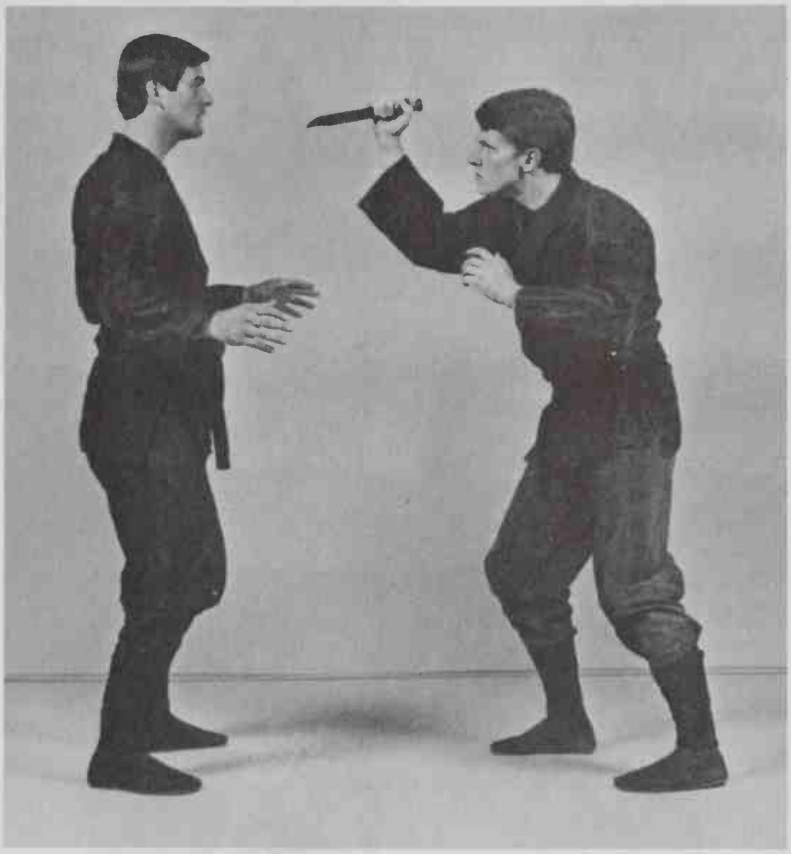
The attacker stabs to the stomach. The defender rocks to his left and slams his fist against the forearm to shock the attacking arm. He simultaneously traps the attacking arm and rocks back against the arm of the assailant with his entire body. Finally, the defender slides his left leg between the legs of the attacker and turns his body to effect a throw. From there the defender proceeds to the disarm.

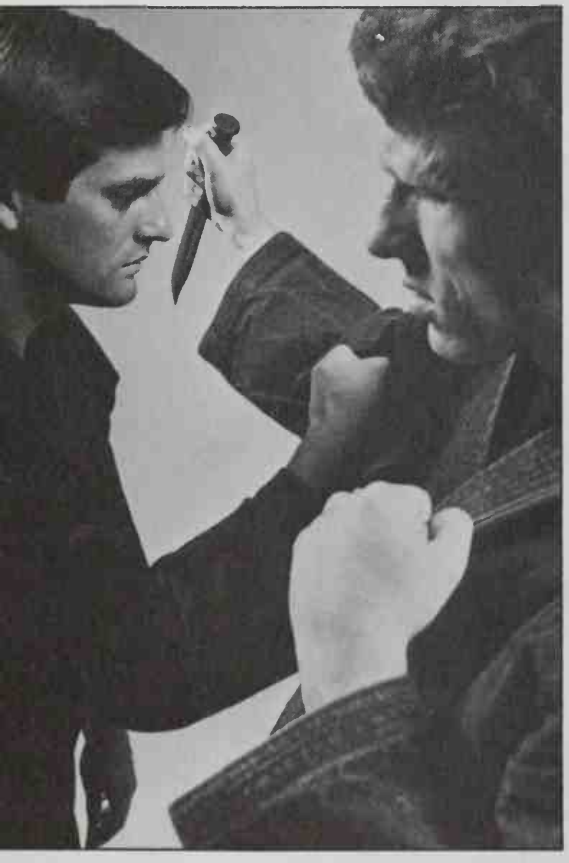
AVOIDANCE TECHNIQUE 2: DEFENSE AGAINST A SLASH TO THE STOMACH

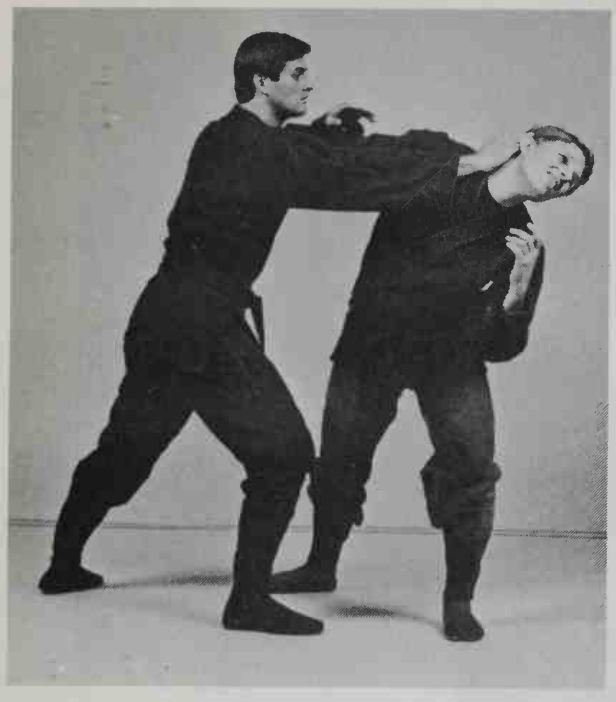
As the defender senses the attack commencing, he moves lightly away and swings the back of his wrist into the inside of the attacker's forearm. (When executed properly, this alone will disarm the attacker; however, we will work from a worst case scenario.) The defender then grabs the wrist of the attacker and lifts it up to straighten the attacker's arm; then he rocks to his right as he swiftly pulls the wrist to the ground for the disarm.











AVOIDANCE TECHNIQUE 3: DEFENSE AGAINST THE DOWNWARD STAB

As the attacker stabs downward, the defender rocks to his right and simultaneously punches into the attacking arm with the right hand. He then rocks back to his right and slams an open hand into the neck of the attacker. The defender straightens out his left arm and moves forward to execute an arm bar. He disarms with the right hand and his own chin.

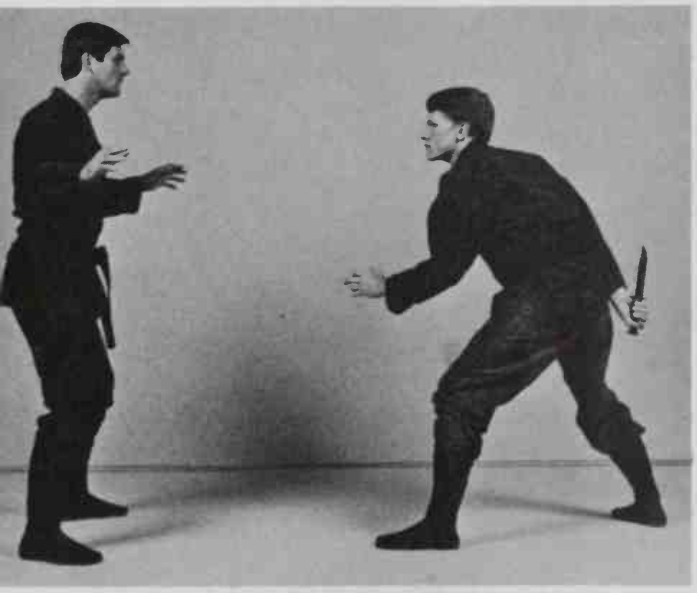
AVOIDANCE TECHNIQUE 4: DEFENSE AGAINST A FOREHAND SLASH TO THE FACE

As the attacker slashes to the defender's face, the defender moves close to the attacker's body, slaps to the face, and squats at the hips (do not bend at the waist, and remember to position yourself safely inside the arc of the cut). The defender then kneels with his whole weight on the back of the attacker's right knee while simultaneously pulling the knife-wielding arm across his body to disarm the attacker.

AVOIDANCE TECHNIQUE 5: DEFENSE AGAINST A BACKHAND SLASH TO THE FACE

The attacker attempts a backhand slash to the face. The defender moves in and to his left, squatting under the arc of the blade. The defender then catches the attacker's right elbow, immobilizing it. Then he rocks to his left to set up for a kick to the attacker's right leg, which fells him and allows the defender to disarm his assailant.

In the event that these techniques may not work smoothly for you the first several times, you should be aware that they are fairly advanced techniques that require a very precise whole-body attitude to perfect. Everything that you need to perfect this whole-body attitude can be learned through prolonged practice of the attitudinal



exercises that precede the technique sections in Chapters 2–5. Guidance from a licensed taijutsu instructor also may be helpful.

After some consideration of the training involved and the apparent complexity of the techniques in the last four chapters, you may ask yourself if you'll be able to remember them in the heat of combat. I want to reemphasize at this point that the preceding chapters have been about *training*. The knife fight itself is a subject that needs to be dealt with separately.

6

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

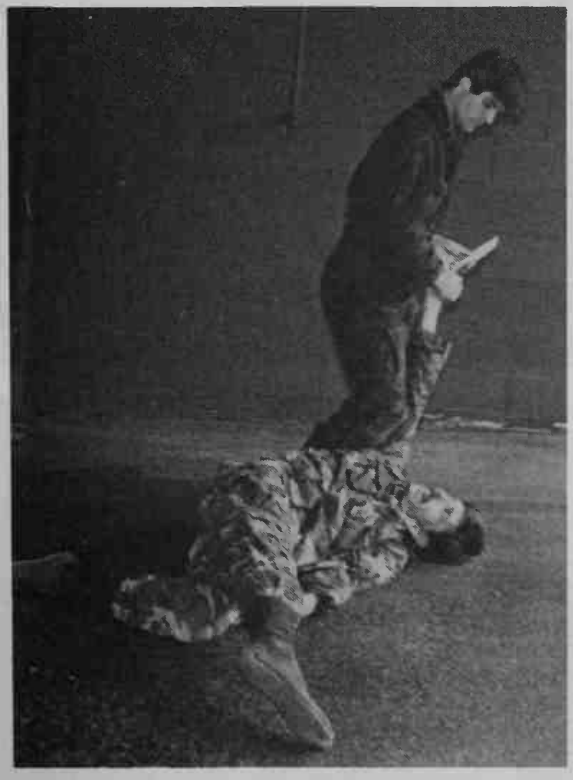
This book, obviously, is finite; we can present only so many possible circumstances. Change any minute aspect of the attack, and you might have to do something other than what is presented in this book. There are an infinite number of "what ifs" that are possible. One way that you could train for the "what if" situation is to practice for a lifetime, trying to catalogue all the possible variations of attack. Once you have worked out a workable response for each, you can program yourself to react appropriately to each one. It has been done this way in some martial arts systems, and with good results. However, we can learn a lesson from the computer age. When we try to program our reactions like a computer, we run the risk of losing our adaptability and flexibility. Also, even the fastest of computers has an access time. It has to recognize the stimulating information, then do a scientific search for the response (if it has one) before it can do anything. The major complaint that most people have

about the computer is that it is too slow. If your response is too slow in a knife confrontation, you may pay the ultimate price.

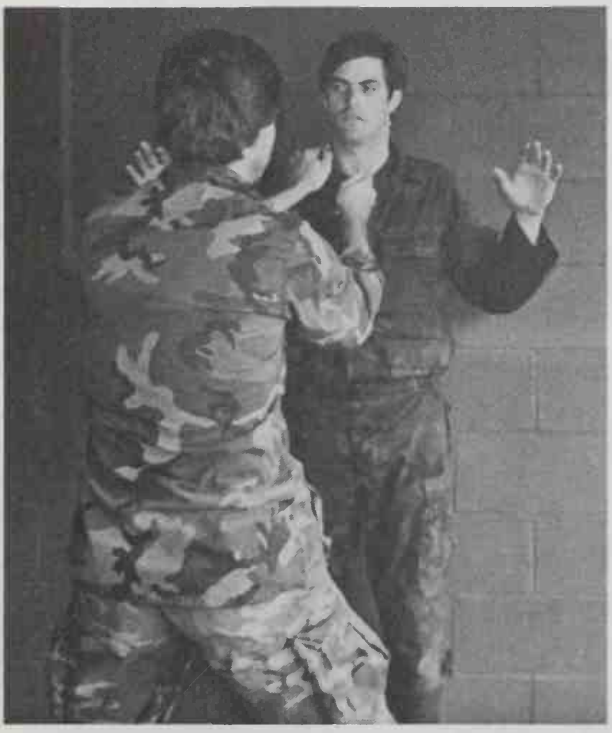
The not-so-underlying message of this book is to learn the generic ability to be naturally self-protective at all times. With this ability, you need not learn millions of techniques; you only have to learn to be natural. Then you can make up an appropriate self-protective response spontaneously. Learning to be natural is an enormously difficult exercise but not as difficult as programming yourself to perform an infinite number of responses with immediate and total recall. There are certain fundamental principles and basic training methods that should be utilized to gain natural movement. Some are listed in Chapter 1 of this book. Others are captured and demonstrated in the exercises and techniques in Chapters 2–5. Following are special circumstances that illustrate some other "tricks" that make the techniques work better.

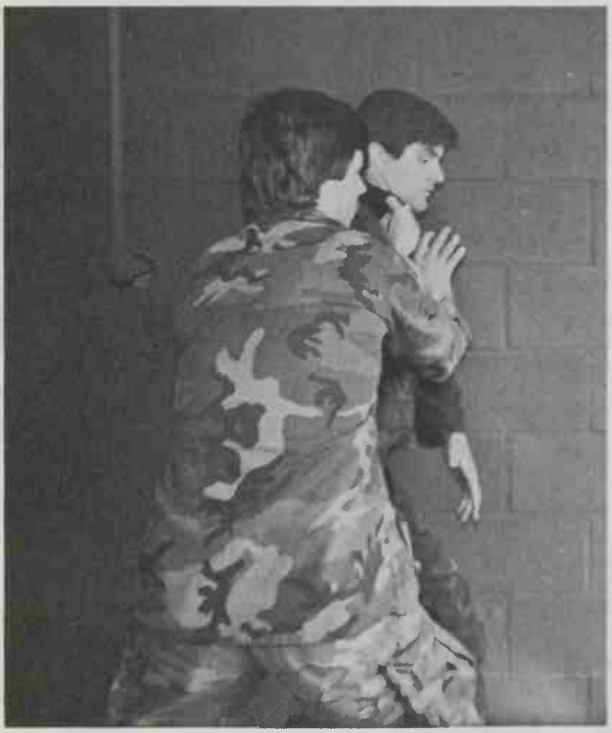
IMMOBILIZING THE WEAPON

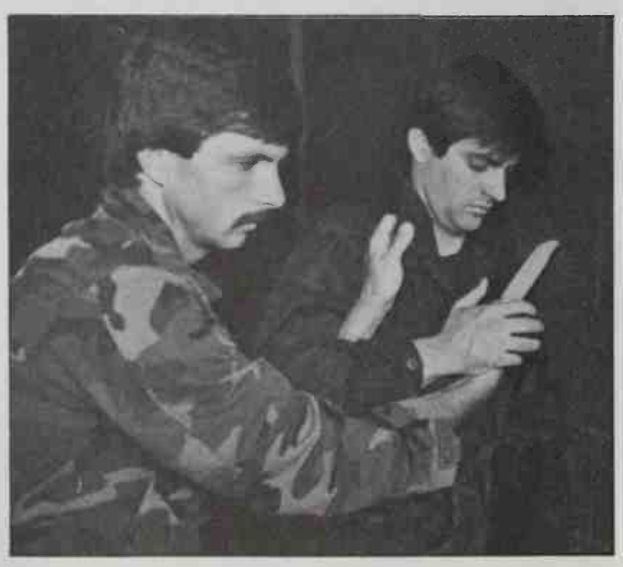
The attacker has a knife to the victim's throat. The defender throws his hand over the attacker's elbow to immobilize the arm. He then executes a right shoulder throw. While the assailant is on the ground, the defender uses an arm bar to force the attacker to drop the weapon.

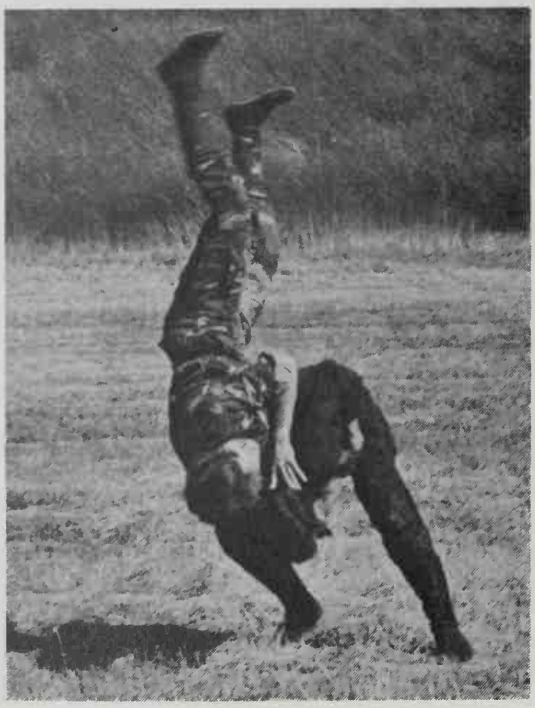


The attacker has the victim against a wall with a knife to his throat. The defender drops his weight and moves away from the knife, simultaneously smashing and scraping the knuckles until the knife is dropped. The defender keeps his body between the attacker and the knife, immobilizing the arm.



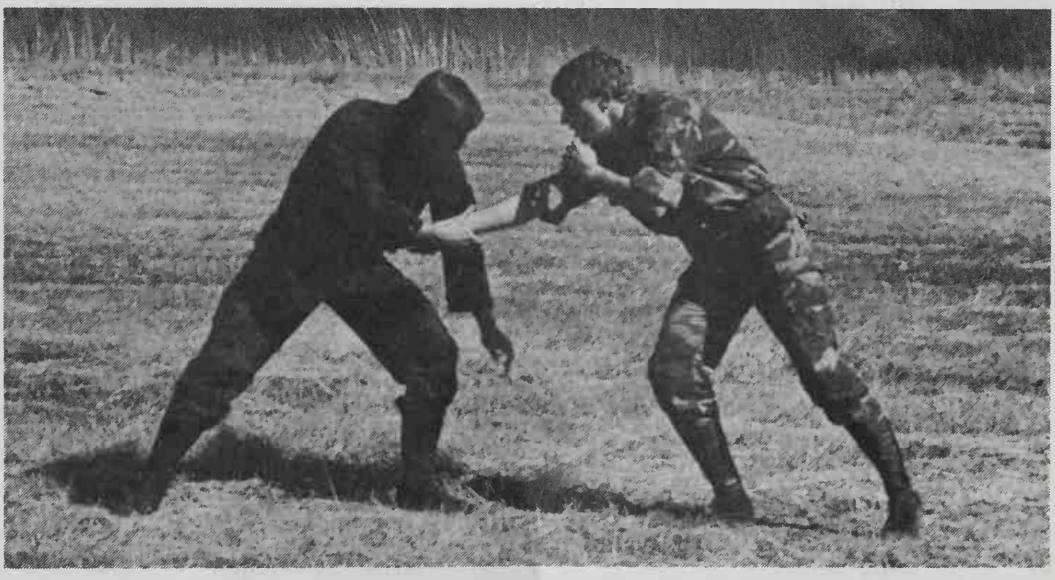




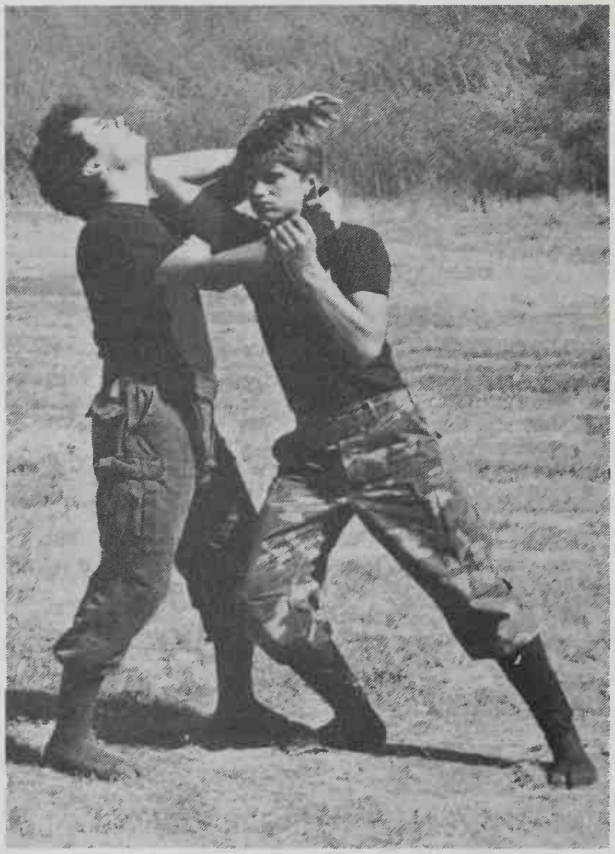


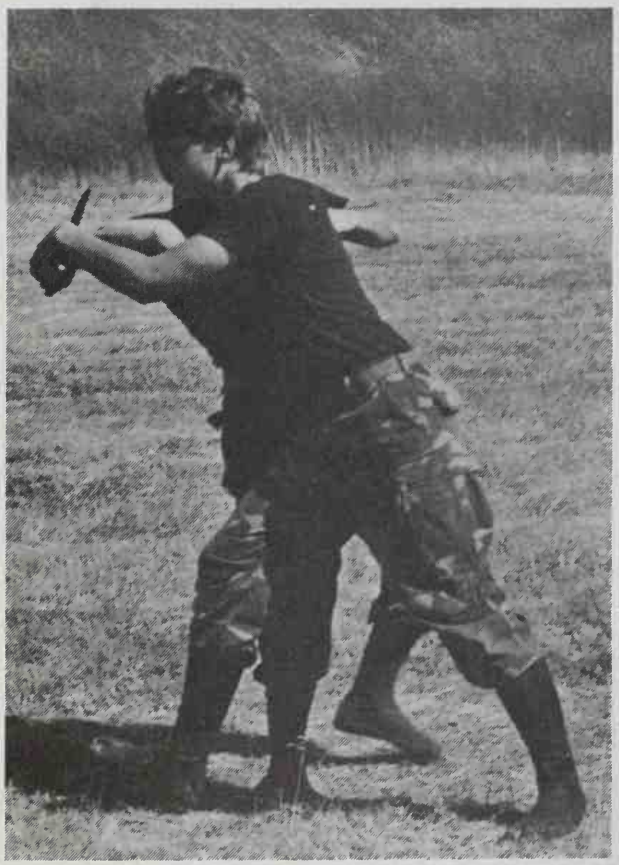
CAPTURING THE FLOW

The attacker slashes widely to the head, and the defender steps inside to capture the flow and turn it into a shoulder throw. From there, the arm is easily immobilized and the assailant disarmed.



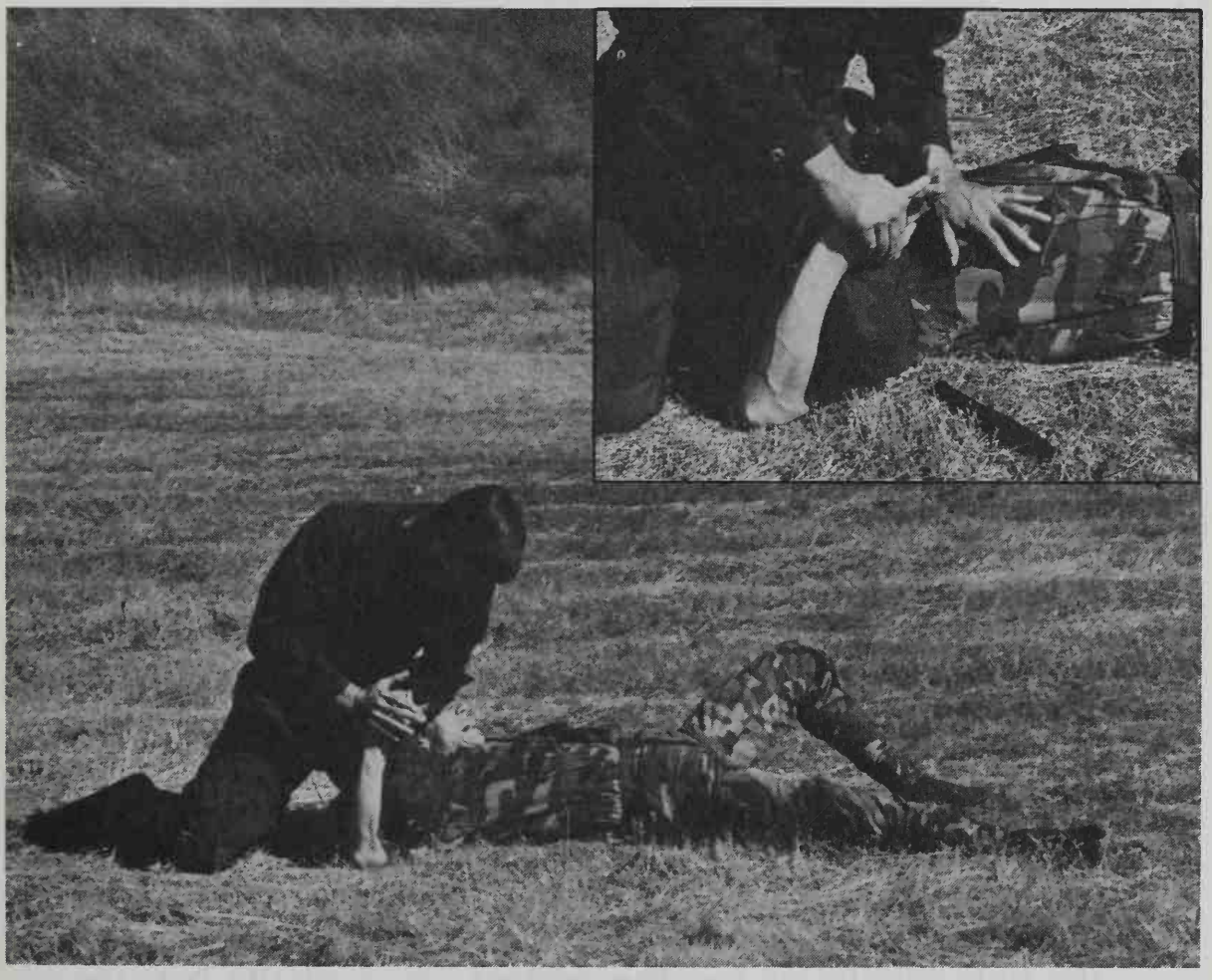
The attacker lunges for the stomach. The defender captures the flow and pulls the arm to the ground, kneeling below the elbow, and disarming the assailant.





GRAPPLING WITH A KNIFE

Hands over head, the defender grapples to protect himself from the knife. He relaxes and moves his elbow into the attacker's chin. As part of the action, the defender moves forward, wrapping up and immobilizing the attacker's arm. He then forces the assailant to the ground and disarms him.



With hands at waist level, the defender attacks the assailant's breastbone with his head. As part of the flow, he steps under the arm for a throw.

7

THE KNIFE FIGHT

Most Americans have played a game or two of baseball in their lives. If you have ever been on a team, you may recall hours of fielding or batting practice. There you were, in the batting cage, hitting ball after ball after ball, instructing yourself as you swung: keep eyes on ball, grip bat tightly, perfect stance, level bat. No matter how often you tried to re-create that practice swing in the game, however, as soon as you stepped up to bat for the real thing, something else seemed to take over. First of all, you never thought to repeat all of your practice day instructions to yourself, and your concentration and intention are at a level that you cannot duplicate even in the most diligent practice session. Let's face it: the practice and the game are two different experiences entirely. I remember the first home run I ever hit in Little League: the ball coming at me, the perfect crack of the bat, the feeling (I didn't need to watch) of the ball sailing over the fence, the pandemonium of the crowd. It felt like a dream, very unreal. Some of the eastern religions call this feeling *satori*, or a feeling of complete harmonious action accom-

panied by a dreamlike feeling that is actually hyperawareness. I suppose that you could wish so hard for this type of wonderful feeling that you could achieve it meditatively. I still believe, however, that I achieved satori that day because I had prepared myself properly by physically practicing and hitting that ball, as well as studying the fundamentals and visualizing the event in my mind many times before the actual game. Those three ingredients—

practice, knowledge, and visualization—are all required for success. Keep that in mind. Wishful thinking alone will not do it.

A knife fight is not a game any more than a baseball game is a life-or-death situation. The only reason that I have drawn this analogy is to prepare you for the fact that a real knife fight will never feel like practice, and practice will never feel like a real knife fight. Since you already know, from working through the preceding exercises and technique sections, what it feels like to practice, I hope that you can use this baseball analogy to get a feeling for what the difference might be. (Having been in a situation with a knife-wielding assailant while stationed with the Marines in the Philippines, I can assure you that I did nothing that can easily be categorized as I have categorized the emotions in the book—I remember very little of what I actually did. The bottom line is that I *am* here to write this book!)

If you are worried that you won't be able to remember which is an avoidance technique, which is a standing-firm technique, and so on, you will be relieved to know that there are no knife fighting techniques to remember. As you may have realized from your old baseball days, what you do in practice you'll do in the game. If you really have understood the main point of this book, you know that I am not talking about techniques that you have aped from a printed page. You know that the most effective way to allow your body to defend itself is to go with the body's natural attitudes and move as you truly feel. It is very safe to trust yourself once you know yourself. You will literally make up your own techniques as you go along.

Please remember that fighting is *not* a sport, and the only one who wins is the one that goes home to his family safe and sound. This may sound obvious, but please run away from a knife if you can. I feel sorry for anyone who would test himself unnecessarily by instigating a fight of any kind. People who do so will get what they deserve, regardless of their technical abilities.

From a pragmatic point of view, you are never ready, yet always as ready as you are going to be, for that knife fight, if and when it occurs. You can't stop the deranged individ-

ual and explain to him that you are only halfway through your knife defense handbook. On the other hand, although you might be able to impress your friends (if you are that type) with your "expertise" after reading the book and practicing the exercises, you might not be able to fool a drug-crazed assailant with a switchblade.

My point? Be *only,* but *exactly,* as good as you are. Remember that you are always right if you are the one who is being attacked. The knife wielder is unnatural, while you are free to move naturally to defend yourself. The soke (head of the family, so to speak) of Togakure ninjutsu, Dr. Masaaki Hatsumi, once wrote that the unnatural person will always concede a victory to a natural person with a clear heart. It is only natural; you can't fight Mother Nature. Sensei Hatsumi demonstrates the use of

taijutsu (natural body movement) as a way to attain a clear and natural heart. The exercises in this book are an introduction to tantojutsu and taijutsu; the techniques are merely possible manifestations. At our level, taijutsu functions as a pragmatic method of self-protection, and that is my message.

I have purposely not talked too much about ninjas per se. I feel that that subject has been covered adequately in the books by Stephen K. Hayes. I realize that many people are interested in ninpo, so I will say that, without the colorings of culture and wishful thinking, natural attitudinal approaches to self-protection *are* a major aspect of the art. I feel that my approach may take some of the romance out of ninjutsu but will make it much more useful for the sincere practitioner. Nin Po Ik Kan!

Afterword

This book is for instructional purposes only. It should be kept in mind that the Ninja Combat System is only effective when used with the taijutsu body flow. Obviously a flow cannot be adequately illustrated in static step 1, 2, 3, etc., pictures. Any readers who are interested in learning the authentic Ninja Combat System and the principles of taijutsu should contact:

The Shadows of Iga Society
P.O. Box 1947
Kettering, Ohio 45429

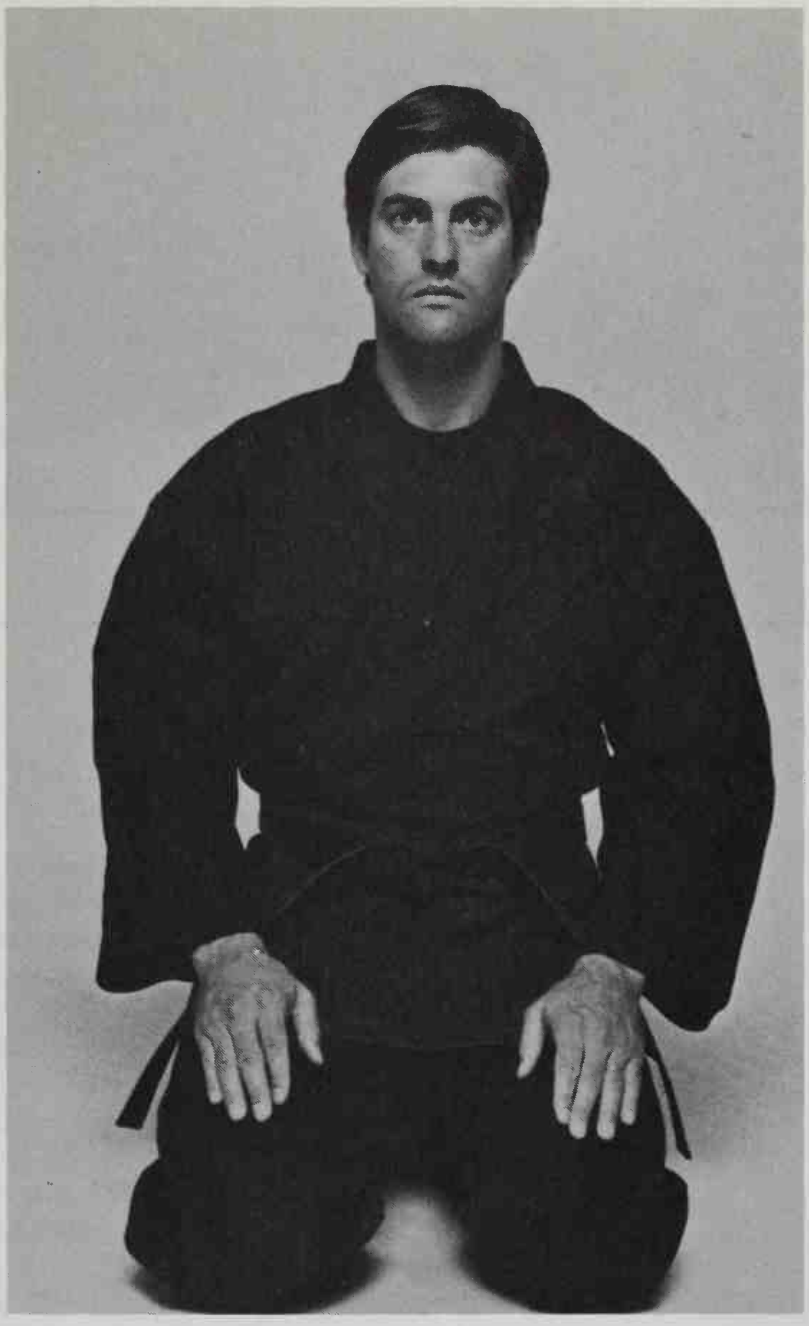
or

The Shadows of Iga (Southwest Chapter)
3808 Rosecrans St., No. 611
San Diego, California 92110

About the Author

Jack Hoban has trained in the martial arts for more than 12 years. He studied Korean karate during high school and college, joined the Marine Corps in 1975, and studied Okinawan karate in Okinawa while serving as a platoon commander with the Third Marine Division in 1978 and 1979. He spent two years training Marine recruits at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego, California, and wrote a knife and bayonet fighting instructional package for the Marines while he was there. He transferred to the Marine Reserves in 1982 but continues to teach the San Diego Marine Special Services self-defense class, the Reserve Officer Training Unit self-defense and physical fitness class, as well as classes to select members of the San Francisco Police Department, the San Diego Police Department, the San Diego County Sheriffs Department, and the U.S. Navy Survival, Evasion, Rescue and Escape (SERE) instructors in Warner Springs, California.

Although Hoban has studied in Korea, Okinawa, the Philippines, and the United States, his name is usually associated with the Japanese art of ninjutsu, in which he



holds a black-belt teaching credential from Dr. Masaaki Hatsumi, the Grand Master of Togakure-ryu ninpo.

He currently teaches martial arts classes and ninja warrior philosophy classes at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD). Now, as director of the Shadows of Iga Society, Southwest Chapter, and a personal student of Stephen K. Hayes, he is considered one of the leading authorities on and active practitioners of ninjutsu in the Western hemisphere.

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TANTOJUTSU

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—**STEPHEN K. HAYES**, author of *THE MYSTIC ARTS OF THE NINJA*

Tantojutsu means "art of the knife" in Japanese, and is an essential component of ninjutsu training. Combining the body dynamics and techniques of ninjutsu with the psychological aspects that every ninja must learn, Jack Hoban teaches the reader a "whole-body" approach to self-defense against the knife.

Jack Hoban has trained in the martial arts for 12 years and holds a black belt in ninjutsu, having trained under Stephen K. Hayes and Togakure-ryu ninpo grandmaster Dr. Masaaki Hatsumi.

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